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A STORY OF RUSSIA AND NIHILISM

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BY

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WITHIN AN ACE.

CHAPTER I.

MY EXECUTION.

It is a patch of sunlight—a tiny patch, no larger than the palm of my hand. I dreamily follow the bar of glistening motes upwards, until my eyes are arrested by the grated window of a prison!

In an instant I have sprung from my low pallet, where—God is pitiful!—I have been sleeping away the last few hours that were left me of my mortal existence. Yes, in very truth—I dream not. I stand here on my prison floor, in full possession of all my faculties, feeling the warm, swift blood coursing in my veins. I draw vigorous breath, my senses are acute. I look with keen appreciation at the wondrous golden ladder which the sun is sending down direct into my cell. What a fair world is ours! How fair a thing is even a single sunbeam! I stretch out my hands, and lave them in this one, that is all my own, whilst visions of summer woods come to me, where whole showers of them burst through fine tracery of branches, to play on the mossy carpet below.

There, on the bosom of that sequestered pool, on whose brink I was wont to linger, the sunbeams lie smiling in sleep. In yon restless, murmuring stream they sport with merry laughter as they twinkle in and out amongst the pebbles. On that flowery bank they rest in day-dreams.

My eyes wander wistfully up to my bit of sky. How blue it is! How sweet and balmy will be

the air this glorious summer's morning! I shall feel it on my cheek when they lead us forth to the gallows around which surges a sea of humanity, all eyes eager and curious to see how we die!

At this thought my mood changes. I draw in my breath with a mighty determination swelling my heart. Of a sudden I seem imbued with the nervous strength of ten!

"Yes, let them gaze! They shall see a man meet death. I will show them!" I exult.

I look down on my powerful frame with grim satisfaction. I grasp the muscles of my long, powerful arms, and rejoice that they are like bands of iron. I long to snatch at some heavy weight, that I may hurl it above my head to test their strength. Never before have I so gloried in this great gift of vigorous manhood as in this last hour of its existence, because by means of it I may show my brothers of the cause of liberty how cheerfully I resign it.

I fall to pacing the narrow limits of my cell with rapid strides. Sit still I cannot. A burning impatience of inaction is consuming me—a pressing desire to be doing something to bridge over the minutes which must elapse before the moment arrives when I shall stride to the scaffold, with dauntless mien, to meet my doom. My acute sense of hearing detects the clink, faint though it be, of the trap in my door, and I turn towards it my gaze. A pair of eyes are looking at me out of a brown, bearded face that I know quite well. There is a twinkle of humour in it, and something else that looks like compunction. I smile and nod affably.

"Good morning, Vladimir Alexandrovitch. I am glad to see you in good spirits," says my official.

"And I thank you for your good wishes, my friend," I reply. "But my breakfast? I tell you, I have a fierce hunger upon me, and hope you mean to give me something good. Remember it will be

the last time I shall have the pleasure of gratifying my keen appetite, until I take my first meal of nectar and ambrosia, and they might chance to keep me long waiting for it on the other side."

My official laughs. "Keep your mind easy, your breakfast comes; and look you," lowering his voice, "just because I love a brave spirit, little brother, I will deprive myself of some caviar I have in reserve for my own relish, and give it for yours. May you enjoy it as well as I should have done!"

"Thanks, my Christian friend!" I cry, reaching my hand towards him through the trap. "May you never die hungry! But quick, let me have it, that I may not quit the world with a pang of regret."

He is going.

"One minute," I say, for it strikes me that this man who seems kindly disposed towards me, may tell me what I long to know. "Tell me, if you know—if you have seen him—the lad—keeps he a good heart?" My voice shakes in my eagerness, whilst I rifle my pockets for my last five-rouble note. "Take it, it is all I have, or I would give you more. How bears he himself? He is but nineteen!"

"I saw him even now," replies the man, as he seizes the note. "He does badly. He eats not, and his strength has left him. He lies on his bed and moves not."

At these words the sweat starts to my brow, and the water to my eyes.

"Friend, good friend," I whisper hoarsely, "for love of God, see him again! Tell him that Vladimir Alexandrovitch bids him be brave! Tell him to eat—he must eat ere he go forth! And oh, good friend! if thou wilt, if thou canst—and surely thou canst?—procure for him some cognac."

"You know not what you ask," interrupts the man, in a sullen whisper, and glancing fearfully up and down the corridor. "I dare not, I cannot! Where, think you, could I get cognac here? I risk much even now in speaking thus to you."

Again he glances up and down; then, as if bracing himself to a resolve, he signs to me to bend down, and puts his mouth close to my ear.

"Listen. I will take your message, just because you are a brave one, and I like you. And if vodki will do—it is quite as potent—I have a dram in my flask. But it must not be too much, he is weak."

"I embrace thee, my brother!" I murmur fervently; and he hurries away.

I am alone again, and continue my walk; but now my mind is troubled with a vision of the fair-faced boy stretched on his pallet, and anon I seem to see his writhing body on the gallows. I shudder and smother a groan that rises to my lips, and turn to seek comfort in the reflection that it will soon be over for him. "He is sure to faint. God grant it!"

Approaching steps in the corridor. My door is unlocked, thrown open, and here is my breakfast and the caviar.

When the official enters I wear a smiling face again, for I have a character to sustain. No man should have it to say that he saw a cloud on the brow of Vladimir Alexandrovitch Lubanoff on the morning of his execution.

I am little inclined to eat—a feverish excitement is choking appetite—yet I eat a hearty meal. The official, a stranger to me, has paused at the door, and is watching me curiously.

"How long now before the play begins, my friend?" I ask between the bites.

It gratifies me to note how he flushes red, and stares at me a space, as if taken aback, before he stammers, "Twenty minutes, Excellency."

I laugh. The notion of an official thrusting a title on a prisoner amuses me. After another prolonged stare he leaves me.

Twenty minutes! Half-an-hour hence I shall be a lump of cold, senseless clay! And that mysterious actuating essence we call soul, what of it? What

will become of it, forced from the tenement wherein it has, for twenty-seven years, ruled supreme? Will it, too, be extinguished like a torch that is stamped out under the foot of man? Away vain speculations, that to mortals can never be more than such! Let me rather, in these my last moments, sum up the good that has been mine. I have tasted as much happiness as this world can offer, and I leave it ere it begins to pall. I have known the rare blessing of true friendship. "My spirit flies out to meet thee, O my friend, and clasp thee in a farewell embrace!" I have—I still rejoice in the beauty and perfect excellence of woman's pure and entire love!

"Ah, my Maruscha, thou art my only regret. Could I but take thee with me, my dove! My better soul! For I know that without me thy life henceforth will be but a joyless groping through a valley where there is no sun."

I am surprised by a tear on my cheek, and dash it hastily away. Boom! It is the quarter bell sounding from the fortress clock. I close my eyes, and gradually a feeling of peace descends on me. Now I can pray. My hands meet and interlace.

"Spirit of perfect Good, forgive me my sins. Fortify me and my comrades in our last agony. Let the evil we have done perish with our bodies, and the good return to dwell eternally with Thee!"

I hear the tramp of soldiery approaching, and raise high my head. "Maruscha, thou shalt not blush for me!" I whisper, and I feel that it is a radiant face I show them as they enter—I know by the blank, fixed gaze which greets me on every side—of sheer wonderment. I advance to meet my executioner, place my arms in position, and silently submit to be pinioned. Not a word is spoken, and in a minute we are ready, and passing in file along the corridor to join the others in the hall of the prison.

I cast a swift glance from face to face of my fellow-martyrs, which is answered by a flash of

recognition and greeting from all save one, and that is poor Vasil. He is a sorry spectacle: his blue eyes roll vaguely, without speculation; his ashen lips hang apart. A gendarme is supporting him.

We are side by side. "Vasil!" I whisper.

He starts as if from some awful dream. Our eyes meet. He gives a great gasp, sets his lips tightly, and pulls himself together, and I am suddenly wheeled round and placed in the front.

Then our last walk begins—through the court, out of the gates into the great open space, where straight in front rises the long platform, and on it the gallows!

Sudden as a flash, a shock of horror seizes me. Only now, with my terrible doom before my seeing eyes, do I fully realise it. To be hanged by the neck! Merciful God, stand by me! But as sudden my soul cries to my shrinking body, "What, art going to fail now?" and I check the shudder that is already holding me, draw up my body to its full height, and march steadily forward.

The steps to the platform creak beneath my heavy tread. I stand high above the heads of the people, and overlook them. Their thousand upturned faces are like the white waves of a troubled ocean. Which is Maruscha's? My eager glances skim the multitude in search of it.

It is there! Quite near me. I could almost kiss it by bending far forward. It is white. Ah! how white! but firm. The eyes are full of tenderness; they are melting with love unspeakable, but they are strong! Our hearts meet and mingle for one brief moment, then I tear mine away. I have a word to say before I die. I step forward to the edge of the platform, and cry:

"Brothers, I repent not! I die joyfully for the cause of liberty."

The multitude stir and murmur like a forest of trees swayed by the wind. The drums roll out in deafening peal. Already the executioner's hands are

upon me. I cast one last look around on Maruscha, and up at the sky.

Something is pulled over my eyes. I am hastily placed in position beneath the gallows, which I know to be at the right end of the platform. A momentary pause. I feel with one excruciating thrill of horror the touch of the loose rope on my neck. A stupendous shock as of a crashing blow,—a noise as of many rushing waters in my ears,—a feeling as if my head was bursting asunder,—before my eyes a million whirling planets, whilst I plunge madly for a footing. Yet I do not die! I seem to suffer an eternity of agony before it gives place to stupefaction, and I pass away.

CHAPTER II.

THE DAY AFTER DEATH.

Faintly, fearfully my spirit is fluttering in and out of the deserted house from whence it has been driven, uncertain to go or stay, giving me the faintest hint of my identity, to leave me again in darkness, yet returning each time with greater confidence, until it finally stays to feebly spread itself from heart to brain, and I realise that I am I!

But where am I? Under what conditions do I now hold my being? My faculties are so numb, so vague, so wavering, that for some time my curiosity is not strong enough to induce me to open my eyes in search of knowledge. When at length I do so, I discover that my eyelids are of lead, and difficult to lift, and that I am in outer darkness.

Next I try to move, though it costs me an effort. My body feels as if swollen to an enormous size, there is not space for it in this strange abode—I am oppressed for space. I strive to make elbow-room. What is this? I lack room! I stretch out my

stiffened arms, and come in contact with—great God—it is my coffin! I am all there now! From all my pores the cold sweat is bursting. My brain is on fire as recollection rushes upon me—the gallows, my death-agony, and the appalling conviction that I have been cut down too soon and buried alive!

In my wild anguish I fight out madly with both hands; but, strange, I fight the air! There is no lid, then, to my coffin! I writhe myself into a sitting posture, and there dawns for me a glimmer of hope.

Cautiously I begin to feel about me, growing every moment more mystified, for my hand comes in contact with a wooden surface, on which the coffin evidently stands. Though I am in my coffin, I certainly am not in my grave! Where, then, am I?

A ray of light shoots suddenly from behind me across the gloom, revealing one side of the rough deal shell in which I sit, a strip of the table on which it rests, and facing me a door. I follow with my tortured eyeballs the beam, and see that it is the moon shining through a small window. There is a door and a window, then, in my mysterious abiding-place! The hope leaps instantly into vigorous being, and with it the determination to escape. I feel strongly about this second life of mine, that it is a divine gift direct from the hands of God. To have to yield it up now would be to die ten thousand deaths. My other life I risked on a forlorn hope, and lost. There was justice in it. I knew the penalty, and had counted the cost. I suffered death in its most degrading, most awful form, and have therefore paid in full. I have satisfied the law, therefore this life I hold is all my own, and to the last drop of my blood I will protect and defend it. This is my view of the case, but as the Russian Government would assuredly take a very different one, the sooner I get my precious self out of this, and hidden away from its ken,

the better. Still sitting up in my coffin, I try by successive efforts of my confused brain to guess at my situation.

I am in some out-house adjoining either a dissecting-room or the residence of some doctor who has purchased my body for dissection. There are two means of exit, a door and a window. The former will be certainly locked, and quite as certainly my strength will not be equal to forcing it, even if I dared venture on making the noise. The window—I again turn towards it—is a casement. Alas, for my broad shoulders: it is small! However, it is my one chance. I must try it. As we are in summer when the nights are short, it must be the dead hour. I have no time to lose. I listen attentively, preparatory to making the attempt. I hear the sough of the wind, the rustle of leaves, the creak of a branch, but human sounds there are none. A cloud must have flitted over the moon, for it is pitch dark again.

Presently I begin to scramble out of the coffin, and feel my way to the edge of the table next the door. I will try it first, though I am sure it will be locked. I drop my stiffened legs to the floor.

Just as I thought, it is fast. The window then, or—God knows what! Blindly, and clinging to it for support—for now that I am in motion I reel like a drunken man—I make the half circuit of the table, reach the window, and seek with my shaking fingers for button or hasp, and there is a rush of cool night air on my brow. It revives me somewhat, and now for it! I set my teeth, and raise myself with my hands by the frame, thrusting out my head and part of my shoulders. Then I pause to gather up my forces. Something taps my crown, making my heart leap to my mouth. It is only the swaying bough of a tree! Another violent effort and my shoulders stick fast!

And now commences a fearful struggle. It is

almost as bad as hanging—the sensations are certainly similar—eyeballs starting, skull bursting, and legs plunging aimlessly, until a frantic kick backwards brings my foot unexpectedly in contact with the edge of the table, and—I get a purchase.

I strain every sinew. There is a cracking and crunching which I imagine to be my shoulder-blades, and I am precipitated forward, carrying the window-frame with a crash to the ground, where I lie, cut, bruised and panting, expecting each moment to hear the stir of aroused and excited humanity. Yet, strange inconsistency of human nature, in spite of my sufferings and my supreme anxiety, the ludicrousness of my situation strikes me, and I shake with hysterical laughter, as I picture the sensation I should create if found. A dog barks. I lie motionless and await the issue. In fact, at this moment, if the whole legion of the Russian Police were on my track, and a step would save me, I could not take it. I have, however, one source of congratulation, that a corpse being beyond suspicion—least of all a hanged one—a disturbed household would scarcely be likely to seek for a possible burglar in the doctor's dead-house.

The barking declines into short, undecided snaps, and finally ceases. There is no sound now save the wind tussling with the trees and bushes that enclose me. No; what is that? I mistake not—it is, it is the faint music of trickling water! My very soul longs for it! My swollen and parched tongue makes a futile effort to lick my lips.

My friends, not one of you, I am quite sure, has ever been hung! You know not what it is to have every gland in your neck, the roof of your tongue, your windpipe in a state of raging inflammation, combined with a sensation as though every nerve that spreads like a network over your skull is being tugged at by a thousand sportive devils! Therefore no words of mine can convey to you the fierceness

the intensity of this longing for a single cup of cold water! I pant, I groan aloud, as I begin feebly and by infinitesimal degrees to drag myself towards the sound, with the great dread upon me that every effort will be my last, that I must succumb ere I have wetted my lips!

Oh, Dives, we are brothers in the quality of this suffering!

At length, putting out my shaking hand, I feel the ground moist. Another movement, and yet another, and I come in contact with a cool iron tank! Still one desperate effort—to save my soul I could do no more—and I have dragged myself up by its edge. My fingers are in water, my lips touch it!

I take—ah, what a draught! and sink to the ground again, whilst tears I cannot check rush to my eyes—a perfect torrent of unspeakable relief.

A peal of distant thunder and a large drop of rain on my face arouse me. I sit up, and think what is to be done. I have no time to lose. In a short time the dawn will break and reveal my terrific aspect. If I am seen in my present plight, shoeless, hatless, half clad, I shall be at once seized and put under restraint as a madman.

I scramble to my feet. That drink has wonderfully revived me! And a moment I pause to lave my temples in the water before starting on my hazardous venture.

To get out from amongst the trees and ascertain my whereabouts must be my first step; so I commence to feel my way along the wall until I turn the corner of my recent prison, where I find more trees and bushes to wind through, and at length emerge under the open sky, on what appears to be a gravel drive. I can dimly discern the outlines of things near me, and within a few feet of me the sleeping-box of the Dvornik, which impels me to beat a hasty retreat in amongst the trees again. Now I begin moving in a slanting direction, with a

view to arriving at the garden wall, guided thither by the locality of the watchman's box; and I eventually come against it; but, alas! my hopes of escape are on the wane again—it is too high to scale! Baffled, but still determined, I set my teeth, and follow the wall. If I must surrender I will make a desperate fight for it. The wall may not be all the same height; I will examine it further.

Presently I come out on a path, and before me is a long, low shed, open to the front. "It is a gardener's tool-shed," I surmise, and swift as light follows the thought: "Here I shall surely find something to aid me!"

I grope my way in, and just then, as if sent by a merciful Providence, the moon breaks through a cloud-rift, and shows me, within my grasp, a gardener's light ladder. In a moment it is dark again. But I have the ladder, and the darkness is just what I want.

It is the work of a few moments to place the ladder in position, to mount it, and drop to the other side, though for a full minute after I drop, I lean for support against the wall, unconscious of everything save the overwhelming shock of pain in my head. It is my head—my head! If only it fail me not, I have confidence in my legs, uncertain though they be, to carry me whither I mean to go.

When I am able to open my eyes I at once recognise the locality, for I am as familiar with Petersburg as a school-boy with the interior of his trousers' pockets. I am in the very heart of the city. This is the Nevski Prospect, and I stand outside the extensive grounds of Professor Schleemann, one of the first surgeons we have, and second to few in the world.

"And so you have purchased the body of your old pupil for dissection, little father!" I smile grimly. "And I am a thief, for I am stealing it from you."

The light of a street lamp shines full on me, I

retire quickly out of its radiation, and pause to consider my next move.

My object has been, since quitting the shady retreat of my coffin, to make for the quarters of my friend Ivan Ivanovitch Kolinsky, there to lie in hiding until I should have sufficiently regained my forces to fly the country; now, however, come what may of it, I must change my plans. Ivan lodges fully three versts from here; to reach him I should have to traverse many streets and run many risks, even if my strength held out, which is more than doubtful. I put a hand to my raging temples, and pass in review the different members of our section. In the urgency of the case I may not indulge preference; the nearest must be my destination. It is none other than Maruscha! Yes, to gain her lodging is my only chance, for I can gain it in twenty minutes if I am fortunate, and fate is propitious. It is the utmost I can do. My love lives at this end of the "Bazar" over a furrier's shop. I think now with anguish of the last time I took tea with her, I and Ivan, in the little sitting-room, with its many pretty feminine toys, so tastefully arranged and redolent of the flowers we had brought her. Slinking along, a wretched outcast, without a spot on earth under the heavens where I have a right to be, I recall that picture now of Maruscha sitting behind her "Samovar" and pouring out the tea for us big, awkward fellows, where we sit together on the sofa, watching all her dainty ways in happy wonderment. How sweet and fresh she looks in her blue gown, with the snowy bands clasping her neck and slender wrists! There is colour on her fair cheeks, and her blue eyes are shining very brightly, for she is half-shy at playing hostess. But after tea we are very merry. Ivan has brought his violin, and we have music. I still hear the tones of Maruscha's mellow voice as it blends with our harsher ones. And now? Will she not fear me, shrink from me? How shall

I get her to believe that I am indeed her Vladimir, and not his spirit, or a creature of her fevered imagination? And yet, I think my Maruscha would welcome me even if she knew that I came direct from Hades to visit her!

With such memories and thoughts thronging my brain, I pass Doctor Schleemann's gates and along the Nevski, shrinking under the occasional glare of a street lamp, and gasping with relief each time I leave one behind me, and can proceed for a space under cover of the darkness. Meanwhile the black, rolling clouds, which have been sending down single heavy drops, begin to discharge themselves, whilst the thunder growls and mutters after the flickering flash. Long may the storm last, for if it should clear before I have reached my place of refuge, faint indeed will be my chance. If the moon should shine out and illumine my still wandering feet, I am lost.

Again and again my heart leaps to my mouth as I catch the motionless outline of a gendarme sheltering under an archway, or starting suddenly from the shadow of a shop-front. Yet I am allowed to pursue my way unmolested, the self-protective instinct of the Russian custodian of the law doubtless working in my favour, and actuating him to keep a dry skin, unless compelled to the contrary. To their minds—if they should bring them to bear upon me at all—I should seem but a late night-reveller, a trifle drunk, yet quite capable of carrying myself home, my startling details being mercifully hidden in the storm rack.

Soaked through, with my shirt clinging to my body—coat I have none—the water running in rivulets from my hair, staggering from side to side, almost blind, and with a sickening dread of falling in a faint fit, I at length reach the narrow doorway which eads by a flight of stairs to Maruscha's lodging. Luckily the narrow stone passage has no door to the street, so I stagger in somehow.

The mounting of those steps is like an interminable nightmare. I drag myself up with long agonised pauses between; step by step. There is but the one hope left me now, that of looking once again on Maruscha's face ere I die.

At last the topmost step is gained, and I see a bar of light streaming from beneath the door. I lay my head down on the landing and listen.

Her light feet are pacing the floor to and fro, now faint, now near. I hear the sweep of her skirts against the door as she turns. Now she sighs, ah! so drearily.

Is she living through again the awful scene of my execution? Perhaps she is meditating self-destruction. Maruscha cannot live without her Vladimir. I raise my head and try to call her name.

The sound I make startles and affrights me; it is like the croak of a raven! I have no voice wherewith to call Maruscha! My heart misgives me—it is all so horrible! It rushes upon me now when it is too late. My appearance, even as a living member of humanity, might well appal a stout heart, but coming from the realms of the dead in this plight, in the still watches of the night, were enough to unseat the reason of mortal man or woman. Yet what am I to do? Go back I cannot! I curse myself for a reckless fool, and a cruel one, not to have rather risked a second hanging than to have come thus to her. If I must frighten a fellow-creature out of his wits, I might at least have selected, as my victim, one of my own sex.

But of what avail such regrets now? I am lying at her door, where I cannot remain. I crawl close to it, striving to summon up courage to knock.

She is near me again. I hear her cry in her despair, "Vladimir! my Vladimir! Oh, my murdered love!"

I breathe a prayer for her, and—knock.

She has paused in her walk, and listens.

"Maruscha—open—it is I!" I croak desperately. I used to have a man's strong deep voice; this could never be recognised as proceeding from anything human.

Within I hear a gasp; but still she opens not.

I must get it over at once—at any cost! I strike the door with my fist.

She makes a resolve. Takes a quick step forward—the key turns in the lock, and the door opens wide.

I cannot see her dear face, but, O God, she sees mine! She sees me where I crouch on her threshold, a ghastly visitant from the dead! I feel her eyes on me. I hear her catching breath. She recoils, and catches at the table for support.

"Fear me not, Maruscha! It is I! Vladimir!"

She covers her eyes to shut out the sight of me.

"Maruscha—I am no ghost. I am indeed thy Vladimir in the flesh!" I croak in my despair. I feel my senses leaving me.

"I would tell thee all—the wonder of it—but—I die—I—I—pity—Maruscha!"

CHAPTER III.

MARUSCHA.

I WAKE from a long, long sleep—a sleep which has been troubled with strange dreams, sometimes gracious ones, full of the presence of Maruscha, when I have felt the soothing touch of her hands, looked into the deep, blue wells of her eyes, and vaguely seen, fathomed there, a wealth of love, and patience, and pity. But more frequently the dreams have been terrible ones, when I have deemed myself shut up in a living grave, gasping for air, fighting vainly for freedom. Or I have been flying from pursuers—whole legions of grinning skeletons, with halters in their bony hands which they would throw like lassos over my head, dragging me down—strangling me

again and again, and yet I died not! I shudder even now at the recollection of these terrors, though I know them to have been but ghastly visions, for I am lying in bed with a delightful, dreamy sense of comfort and retirement, and there is not an ache or a pain in all my body, only a great languor, which is pleasant since there is no need for exertion. There is a delicious perfume of roses in the air, reminding me of the "rose walk" in the garden of my old home in Kieff. But I am not at home. My eyes have begun to wander from one detail to another of my surroundings: the dainty toilet-table with its gauzy drapery tied with knots of blue ribbons; the hanging bookshelves against the wall filled with brightly-bound volumes; the crimson curtain of the portière that runs along one entire side—Maruscha's room is divided by a crimson portière! The vase with roses on the little table by my bed. I gave that vase to Maruscha!

"Maruscha!" I whisper, with my languid pulses beating faster. There is a stir at the other side of the portière, and instantly her sweet face appears at the opening in the curtains. I see the light of a great joy leap suddenly to her eyes, as she comes towards me.

"Vladimir!" There is a whole world of joy in her utterance. She has my hand in hers, and our eyes meet in one long look of unutterable satisfaction.

"My dove!" I murmur.

She puts her finger on her lips. Her face is radiant with smiles, and shining like the morning star from the golden setting of her hair.

"My beautiful one!"

"Thou must not talk, but sleep again, my Vladimir!"

She is withdrawing her hand, and I feebly catch at it. She will vanish, this angelic vision, and leave me in darkness.

"I go but to get thee thy medicine," she says, and

stroking the back of my hand with her disengaged one: "Thinkest thou I would leave thee? I cannot if I would—thou knowest I could not!"

I release her lingeringly, and watch her glide away, throwing back at me a tender glance, and a nod ere she disappears.

I lie quite still, listening to the rustle of her dress as she moves about. There is the faint chink of china and she is at my side again, raising me with her soft arm about my shoulders, whilst she puts a cup to my lips.

"Now thou must drink this, nor leave a drop!" she says, with a little air of authority.

I do not object. If it were poison, and held to my lips by Maruscha, I would swallow it; but it is bouillon, and the fumes recommend it to my stomach. When I have drunk it, she deftly turns my pillow and lays me back.

"Now thou wilt sleep."

Her voice is like the coo of the stock-dove!

She takes up a bit of needlework from the easy-chair, but goes and sits where she is out of the range of my vision.

"Where I can see thee, I pray thee, Maruscha!" I plead.

She bends forward. "Wilt thou not be content, wilful one?" she murmurs. Yet she goes to her easy-chair, facing me, though she shakes her head.

As she sits before me, bending over her work, and I gazing at her, I see a shyness come over her, such as I have never seen before. The rosy blushes dye her fair skin, and, as if to hide them, her head droops lower.

In my love I am cruel, and think only how the blushes are for me, and how lovely they look. At length they fade, and I note that she looks pale and worn, and that there are anxious lines about her sweet mouth, and violet marks under her eyes.

These, too, are for me!

Before me instantly, blotting her out from me, rises a vision from somewhere in my past. I lie panting, bruised, half-naked, voiceless, with a ghastly mark about my neck—an object to turn from with shuddering horror—on her threshold. And after? Her brave heart conquered the dread! She took me in, put me in her own white bed, nursed me.

A great sob lifts my breast, and breaks the stillness.

She looks up startled, and the needlework falls from her fingers. I try to stretch my hand towards her—see her I cannot for tears—but it falls powerless on the counterpane.

"Maruscha," I falter, "let me—let me kiss thy hand!"

She flies to me. "My hand, my lips! What thou wilt; but weep not, Vladimir!"

She kisses me wildly, not thinking what she does, but only of pacifying me.

"Thou hast been ill—very ill; thou must not excite thyself—it is bad for thee. Think not of the past, it is over—all over, and thou art with me! Think how I have striven to nurse thee well, and thou wouldst undo all! Fie on thee! Thou hast no pity for me!"

Talking thus, she takes her handkerchief and dries my eyes, sweeps the hair from my brow, and lets her fingers rest on it caressingly. Angel! What angel direct from the seat of Mercy but would pale beside my Maruscha! What language of any sphere could convey the extent of my love for her? Do my looks tell her this? Her own fall beneath them, and she busies herself with the arrangement of my pillow and the smoothing of my counterpane. "Now shut thy eyes, thou must indeed! And think not at all, but sleep. I stay by thee."

And she seats herself on the side of the bed. I possess myself of her hand, and holding it against my lips, my spirit slips away into the sweet oblivion of dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW IT HAPPENED.

My life is a succession of deep and tranquil sleeps and blissful awakenings to the discovery of Maruscha's presence. I wish it would last for ever, but already it is passing into something less exquisite. During the first day or two, when I was too weak to move, Maruscha was as tender as a mother and a lover in one. To induce me to sleep she would sit by me on the bed, and let me hold her hand. She would call me endearing names; would stroke my hair and my cheek; but now she becomes every day more reserved. This irritates me, yet I know that her love for me is unchanged. She confesses it to me constantly in her eyes, even when her manner is most distant. As a nurse she is perfect. She anticipates my slightest wish. And how gently she moves about, neither hurried nor slow! There is rhythm in her every movement, because of the divine harmony within her, controlling and guiding her actions. I love to lie and watch her, and this morning I have insisted on having the *portière* drawn aside, that I may observe her cooking at her little stove, sweeping, dusting, and glorifying the most menial task. Yes, I love to watch her at her work, but I am grown selfish, and watch grudgingly, waiting for the moment when she will be able to devote herself exclusively to me. I am ashamed of the deceit of my heart, yet I do not amend, and my mind is continually employed devising pretexts to bring her to my side. Now it is my pillow that has got displaced, now my head is hot, and needs the application of Maruscha's cool palm; again I am athirst, or my handkerchief is lost, or has fallen to the floor. It is ever—

"Come here, Maruscha, I pray thee!"

And she is my willing slave in all things save

one. She will not suffer me to caress her. I may not even hold her hand for long, or carry it to my lips. If I venture on the latter, she gently but firmly withdraws it, casting on me such a look of fond reproach that I am fain to blush like a schoolgirl at my temerity, and wish I had restrained myself.

Maruscha avoids all mention of that awful chapter in my life, the subject seems so hateful to her that I have abstained from questioning her, though I am consumed with curiosity to know how my sudden appearance out of the grave, as it were, had affected her. She must have got a terrible shock, that she shrinks thus from all reference to it, for Maruscha has a strong mind.

She evidently fears, too, that the discussion of so painful a theme would injure me in my still weak state, for I can see that she has enjoined Ivan—the only member of our section besides herself who knows of my existence—not to let me talk of it to him.

When I would speak of it, he has different ways of eluding me. He will rise hastily as though something has just occurred to him about which he must consult Maruscha; or he will pretend not to hear me, and put a sudden question, as—

"Has Maruscha read thee Pushkin's latest poem? No? Then I must bring it for thee: it is glorious!"

Meanwhile the foolish ones, in their anxiety for me, are tormenting me unspeakably. My mind is perplexed with questions, which to have answered would relieve it of a burden.

I lie watching Maruscha making our tea, when Ivan's knock comes to the door, accompanied by his low whistle. Maruscha opens to him, and locks the door again; whilst I determine that to-day he shall not quit me until I have had it out with him.

He approaches my bed. "Well, and how goes it to-day?" he inquires.

"I am much better," I say impatiently. "And I am glad thou hast come, for thou wilt stay with me

whilst Maruscha takes the air. After tea—I insist, she goes out! See how pale she grows——"

"How canst thou talk thus, Vladimir! Had I ever much colour? Never in all my life felt I better than now. And air I have enough through the window. In this warm weather it stands open all day."

"Maruscha, wilt thou not please me?"

"Vladimir, thou knowest——"

She stops short and flushes. I am looking at her, and there is command in my looks. She sighs.

"As thou wilt," she almost whispers, but when she brings my tea, standing with her back to Ivan, who is now at the table, I see that tears are in her eyes.

"My precious one!" I whisper. "Forgive me!" Yet I say not "Stay."

After tea I am in a state of feverish anxiety for her to be gone. For once she moves too slowly for me. I wonder if she will ever finish buttoning her gloves, and she has so many injunctions to give Ivan before she finally goes, with a last, wistful look at me, as I kiss my hand to her.

I have also caught certain significant looks and nods passing between her and Ivan, and I set my lips firmly as my eagerness and determination intensify.

Directly I am alone with Ivan, I sign peremptorily to him.

"Come and sit by me, Ivan," I say: "I have much to say to thee. I have sent Maruscha out that we may have a talk."

He looks troubled, but comes to my side.

"Now listen. Let me speak"—as he would have interrupted me—"Thou and Maruscha are making a mistake. You think that talking of—of certain things with me is bad, that it will excite me and retard my recovery. I tell thee, my brother, that with thy silence thou art doing what thou wouldst avoid. Canst thou stay the action of the mind? Thou canst not, and the thoughts that I may not utter prey upon it, giving me no rest. Therefore

thou wilt answer my questions, Ivan? Thou seest now thy error?"

He replies not, but his looks are still troubled.

"In the first days of my recovery," I continue, "doubtless this silence was necessary. Now I have regained some of my strength: my mind has recovered its balance. Thou wilt answer my questions?"

He moves uneasily, and I see that his situation is painful to him; but thus driven into a corner, he cannot escape.

"If thou wilt, thou wilt," he says at length. "Thou hadst ever the obstinacy of a mule, yet I maintain that such talk is bad for thee."

My head certainly is beginning to throb, but it is just through impatience of curiosity. I begin my catechising.

"Tell me first, what did Maruscha when I fainted on her threshold?"

"When she saw thee first she feared greatly. It was when she heard thy head strike the floor, and saw thee lying motionless, that she rushed to thee with but the one thought of aiding thee." He pauses.

"And then—after?"

"She tried to lift thee, but could not—naturally; so she dragged thee into the room, and locked the door, and strove to revive thee."

"Oh, my poor Maruscha!" I groan.

"Vladimir, ask no further, I beg of thee!" Ivan rises. "Is it not enough that thou art here and safe? Why recall these painful details? See how excited thou art growing! Leave it until thou art recovered at least! Come, let me read to thee."

"No. I must hear all. Sit down; thou wilt drive me mad, Ivan, if thou tellest me not all—now at once!"

He passes his hand over his face, which is full of dismay and resuming his seat, continues hastily in short, disjointed sentences.

"She could not revive thee—she tried long. She thought thou wast dead. She came for me,

Fortunately I had not gone to bed. I sat by the window. There was a thunderstorm, and I watched it. Suddenly came a tremulous knock to my door. I opened—it was Maruscha."

"How looked she?" I whisper.

"She had flown for me without her hat—the wind had caught her hair—it was streaming down—she was wet."

The picture of Maruscha at that moment rises before me.

"She is ghastly white—her looks are distraught—she cannot speak," I supplement.

He bows his head. "I gave her some cognac, and—she told me. I thought that grief for thee had driven her mad. I believed not her story, but I went with her. In the street I saw a droski. I hailed it. The Isvostchick stared at Maruscha. 'A case of sudden illness,' I explained. We got out at the end of the Arcade, and went on foot to her lodging. I found thee." He pauses again.

"And I?"

"Thou wast still unconscious. She had raised thy head with a pillow, and covered thee with a shawl. I had brought cognac with me—I poured all that was in the flask down thy throat. It was long ere life returned to thee. There is no more to tell."

"And thou puttest me to bed, stripping off thy shirt for me, my brother! What had Maruscha done without thee?"

I ponder these things. How much I owe to Ivan! All I have he has supplied, he never comes to me with empty hands: yet the burden of these obligations is sweet, because he is the brother of my adoption, not of my flesh, but of my soul! Presently my thoughts return to Maruscha. "And Maruscha, slept she not any, day and night, whilst the fever was on me?" I ask, with my heart swelling.

"Sometimes, but seldom, she let me stay and watch by thee. I represented to her that if she slept not she would fall ill. Then she slept on the sofa."

I ponder again. "My tender one! How long must I keep thee out of thy nest? An eagle in the nest of a dove!—Ivan, would that I were well again!" I say. "Thinkest thou not it goes too slowly? Surely I might try to rise now, and sit up. Maruscha is too careful. I must make more effort, and get well to relieve her of this great care of hiding me, and keeping me here. Think, I take all from her!"

"Bah! speak not thus. She would be wild if she heard thee. Is it not Maruscha who loves thee—ah, how she loves thee, Vladimir! To have thee thus dependent on her is a taste of heaven to her!" Ivan sighs, and his head droops. I wish with all my heart that there were two Maruschas.

After a silence I ask, "Wouldst thou not know of my escape, Ivan? Were I in thy place I should be consumed with curiosity. How thinkest thou that I escaped death? How a living grave? Thou knowest that my grave was dug for me beside the others."

"Perhaps I know more than thou of the affair," replies Ivan, and in truth he looks as if brimming with mysterious information.

"Well?" I say, "let me hear. I see thou art bursting to tell it!"

"Let be now, Vladimir, it is enough. Thy cheeks are aflame. Maruscha, when she comes and finds thee thus, will certainly forbid me to visit thee. She will be very angry, for has she not enjoined me not to let thee talk of these things?"

"Yes, yes, I saw her sign to thee, the foolish little faint-heart!" I respond with a laugh. "My faculties are all there, in spite of the wrench they got: I see and hear more than is meant for me. And now I mean to hear the story of the strange journey of Vladimir Alexandrovitch Lubanoff through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, whilst I shut my eyes, and fall asleep over it. When I was a child, I remember my 'Babuschka' used to tell

me stories to put me to sleep, and the method was always successful. Now relate, Babuschka, I wait."

I compose myself and pretend to shut my eyes, but peep at him through my lashes.

I observe that his broad honest face, with its grey, deep-set eyes, begins to look absent, as if his mind was away gathering up threads of memory.

"Where shall I begin?" he asks.

"Begin at the execution. It was a lovely morning towards the latter end of June," I prompt.

He pauses a moment. Then, as if controlled by my will, he begins: "The morning fixed for the execution of five political criminals—martyrs, I should say—who were condemned to be done to death on the gallows for attempting to free their country of a tyrant under whose sway a nation, alas! still groans. Thousands have met together to witness their martyrdom, and few there were—thank God, but a few—who did not bless them! I was there with Maruscha Petrovna—we took our stand as close as we could to the scaffold, from whence we might see our brothers emerge from the prison gates, and take their way to meet their doom. To be there to encourage them with our presence, and to strengthen our resolve to avenge them, we considered our sacred duty. I see them now—my brother Vladimir Alexandrovitch at their head, looking like a triumphant warrior going to receive his crown of bays! My heart gave a leap of mad exultation at sight of him, marching so proudly with the smile upon his lips, his head towering above all!"

"Thou sawest no start—no shudder, Ivan? Flinched I not visibly at first?" I ask anxiously.

"I tell thee, like a conqueror wert thou! I heard the crowd murmur their admiration. The others walked firmly, but their faces were gloomy, fierce, and set. Vasil was ghastly pale, his eyes rolled wildly, but he walked without assistance. Right on—up the steps, and forward to the far end of the

scaffold thou wentest. I saw thy eyes search and find Maruscha; me thou sawest not."

"My brother!" I feel a sharp pang of remorse thus to have slighted Ivan.

"Something thou hadst to say, and no time to lose. The words are burnt into my heart: 'Brothers, I repent not! I die joyfully in the cause of liberty!' And joyful was thy face even until the last! And then followed such a scene as none present will ever forget. Like dogs they hung you! The drops were too short! The executioners knew naught of how to hang their kind. In two cases the ropes broke! Thine was one of them! My blood boiled. With an oath I rushed forward, but was thrust back and held by gendarmes. Then I saw that Maruscha had fainted—was in the arms of a stranger, so I returned and took her into mine. Around us a tempest of passion was raging. Shrieks of women—hisses, groans, curses—cries of 'Shame!' rent the air. The multitude had gone mad with horror, and came surging forwards as a man to the rescue. They were beaten back by the soldiery, who used their bayonets, and the most persistent were wounded. I stood holding Maruscha, with seven devils tearing my breast. I yelled with impotent fury! And they had strung you up again, like dogs—like curs, I say!"

He gasps for breath. His face has grown purple. I, too, am struck with amaze, and raise my head from the pillow to gaze at the speaker.

'We were long in dying," I say at length, recalling my prolonged torments.

Ivan, who was staring at the wall before him, as if he saw the scene painted there, starts at my words, and remembers himself. He rises hastily.

"My God! I must be mad," he mutters, "to speak to thee of these things. Forget them—let us talk of something else."

"Nay, the worst is told," I say, letting my head fall back on the pillow. "Finish thy tale, and then

I shall be satisfied, and dismiss it from my mind. Quick, tell me the end, ere Maruscha return!"

"There is little more. The callous brutes bungled through it somehow. They were in a mighty hurry, for they feared for their lives. What cared they how they performed their task, so that it was quickly! The prison doctor came forward and pronounced you dead. He was as white as a ghost, and almost fell in going down the steps of the scaffold. He relished not his task. I saw Professor Schleemann push his way through the crowd and whisper with the Governor, and guessed he was bargaining for one of the bodies. After that I took Maruscha away."

"And the worthy doctor selected me, determined to have the best weight for his money. And what said he when he found his bargain gone? What said Petersburg?"

"What else but that the body had been stolen by Nihilists, in order that they might go and worship by the secret shrine of their martyred saint!"

The key is turned in the lock, and Maruscha enters quickly. She carries several parcels which she deposits on the table, glancing the while from one to the other of our excited faces, to rest her eyes with a sparkle of anger on the shrinking Ivan. She speaks no word, but throws off her outdoor things, and at once busies herself mixing a glass of "eau sucré," but with a mien as fierce as if she were mixing a cup of hemlock. She approaches me with it.

"Thou wilt take this, Vladimir, to cool thy excited blood," she says.

"What thou wilt, my dove." Having got what I want, I am as meek as a lamb, as malleable as wax, and swallow my potion to the dregs.

"Ivan Ivanovitch, excuse me," Maruscha looks towards, but not at, Ivan as she speaks. "I think thou hadst better go now. Vladimir is not *nearly* so well this evening, and must have perfect quiet. Perhaps with great care he may avert a return of fever."

"I—I hope it is not so bad as that, Maruscha," Ivan stammers, trying to catch Maruscha's severe eye, and failing. Poor Ivan, he is abject in his repentance. "I go; adieu. Sleep well, Vladimir."

He pauses at the door, and fixes an appealing gaze on the relentless Maruscha, who is letting him out. "I may come to-morrow?" he falters.

The answer is long in coming.

"To-morrow? As thou wilt, I shall not go out to-morrow." Then, as he is going, "Adieu, Ivan—to-morrow."

CHAPTER V.

I LEAVE HEAVEN BEHIND.

I FEEL inexpressibly sad to-day, and Maruscha shares my feeling. As she sits beside me, her sweet fair face, downcast, over her work, I guess that it is only my presence that keeps her from weeping. Her swift needle glances in and out of the linen she has on her lap. She is finishing a shirt for me to take with me, and there is not much time left now. Ivan comes for me this evening, and we leave together when the darkness falls.

It has been heaven to me, this calm, blissful period of convalescence—all too short, and here is the end of it, and the beginning of fresh struggles with the world, the flesh, and the devil. God alone knows whether this short taste of happiness may not have been my last! Perhaps just now, being still very weak, and to some extent dependent on others, I am inclined to take a gloomy view of things; but in quitting this peaceful asylum, made heavenly by Maruscha's presence, I feel as if I were turning my back on joy, and my face to sorrow.

Like a burst of pure sunlight and serene blue between fierce storms it seems to me. Already the threatening clouds are lying on the horizon,

ready to roll up and darken the sky, and now I lack the strength to battle with the tempest. I am not the man I was, nor ever shall be! I caught a glimpse of my face the other day in Maruscha's little mirror, and it startled me. My cheeks are sunk, my eyes hollow—I look like the ghost of my former self, and I feel like it—the shrinking, spiritless ghost of that other one who boldly met his death on the scaffold. I rise from the easy-chair, and take a few turns in the room to test my ability to use my legs.

"Maruscha, I am as helpless as a child learning to walk!" I observe bitterly.

"That is what I say, Vladimir; but thou wilt not listen to reason," responds Maruscha, throwing down her sewing, and coming quickly to my side. She takes my arm, and places it round her shoulder, thus making of herself a support for me. "It is too soon. Thou art not yet fit. Why go to-night? Stay where thou art a few days longer, until thou hast gathered strength. What is all this foolish talk of being a burden—endangering me by thy presence here? Burden! As if aught could be a burden between thee and me! It is an insult to my love to talk thus, as if my love for thee were a poor half-hearted thing! And danger! Who will come here to disturb us? Has there been any danger hitherto? Thou knowest I have few friends to seek me, and the few, save Olga, think me out of town. And Olga, when she called, suspected nothing. What could she suspect? Certainly not that thou wert returned to me from the grave. Thou wert behind the portière: she came and went, and where was the danger? Moreover, I could trust Olga Petrovna, if need be. She would be as secret as the grave!"

Maruscha clasps the hand of mine that hangs over her shoulder, and lays her warm cheek against it.

"Say thou wilt stay, my Vladimir!" she pleads, "only a few days longer, and I will see thee go with half the grief."

And ah, how gladly would I say, "I will," but that I must not!

This move has been talked of for some days past. Ivan has been urgent, and my soul, if not my flesh, responds to his wishes. Whatever Maruscha may say, there is danger in my sojourn with her—danger both to her safety and to her reputation. Though the situation was forced on us by necessity, and accepted joyfully and without—I am sure of it—an afterthought by my pure-minded love, we men feel that it is one that must be put an end to as soon as possible.

I press my lips to her hand.

"My generous one!" I murmur. "It must indeed be! I have lingered with thee too long. It has been a dream of bliss, this bit of life with thee—fain would I dream on, but we are in the world where such dreams must be brief."

A sob escapes her, and in my desire to comfort her I assume an air of cheerfulness I am far from apprehending.

"But this is no parting, Maruscha. I go but to Ivan, and whilst I am there we shall see each other daily. Let us not meet trouble half-way, it overtakes us soon enough. And when the parting comes, as come it must, there will still be the prospect of our reunion. The world is wide, and surely I shall find some spot under a free sky on which to build a modest little nest for thee and me? Think of that time, dear heart. Hope for the best."

"Ah, if thou wast but safely out of this terrible land, then I might hope!" Maruscha sighs.

"I have great faith in the future," I cry. "A man is not snatched from the very waters of Death only to be cast back again like a worthless weed. There is some special end in these sudden acts of Providence. Thou wilt see this, my second life, will not be wrested from me."

I sit down again, and draw Maruscha to my side.

"Maruscha," I continue, "I have been thinking

much of our future whilst I lay there, and of how thou wouldst help me to make it worthy. That other life was all wrong. I made nothing of it."

"Vladimir!" interrupts Maruscha, and her eyes shine like stars. "Thou gavest thy life for the great cause!"

"And what has it availed? Is the world the better for my sacrifice? The tyrant still oppresses. Liberty still lurks in secret places, and will continue to do so. And why? Because as a nation we are not ripe for liberty. One half is asleep, the other is in the thrall of consuming passions, and nothing attempted in the heat of passion can have good results. Conviction must have matured into steady calm ere action is proceeded to. We have not arrived at that yet, and it is with the individual—with ourselves we must deal! Ourselves we must emancipate from the bondage of passion before we can hope to see our efforts crowned with success. It has ever been a mad, blind rush at the enemy."

"Filled with a noble enthusiasm!" puts in Maruscha. "O Vladimir, thou art indeed changed. The cause, then, is nothing to thee now?" She looks mournfully up at me.

"Not so, Maruscha. It is as ever, everything to me. I love liberty more that life; only my opinion as to how to attain to it is changed. Hitherto I was at the wrong end. Mistakest thou not the lurid flare of passion for the pure flame of enthusiasm? I fear it is so."

Ivan's knock and signal interrupt us. Maruscha is leaving me to open the door. I detain her.

"Thou art disappointed in me, sweet love?" I whisper, watching her face in much anxiety.

Her eyes seek the ground. "I—I understand thee not," she falters.

"Yet thou canst trust me," I breathe.

The blue, bewildered eyes turn on me, and our glances meet. I see hers clear and kindle until

naught shines in them but pure, unmixed love. Then suddenly, as if by an unaccountable impulse, she puts her two hands on my shoulders, and murmurs, "Thou art my very soul and my conscience, Vladimir! Thy thoughts, thy aspirations, thy God are surely mine!"

She stoops and presses her lips to my forehead, and leaves me quickly to admit Ivan.

He enters with a coat over his arm, and after greeting us, produces from his pocket a soft felt hat, which he throws on a chair. Now he comes and stands before me, regarding me critically.

"How long hast thou been up to-day?" He inquires at length.

"Only about an hour. I have husbanded my forces for this evening."

"That is well. Canst thou walk the length of the Arcade?"

"If put to it, I could walk twice the distance."

"Because I think it would be wiser to take a droski from there. We cannot be too cautious. I like not the way that furrier below stares at me when I come and go. He is thy landlord, Maruscha?"

"Yes, I like him not. He is an impudent, prying fellow. Not that it matters what he thinks of me," Maruscha says. Yet she is a woman, and a blush overspreads her face as she speaks.

It is well that I am going. The frequent visits of Ivan at all hours is placing my innocent dove in a false light. This, too, she bears for me.

Maruscha makes us some tea, and whilst we take it Ivan tells us the latest news. Fifty men and women have been arrested on suspicion of being implicated with the Nihilists. Three assassinations of tyrants have occurred in different parts of the country, and everybody is talking of the daring "leader" in to-day's issue of the *Voice of the People*. Ivan produces the newspaper and reads it to us.

And all this falls flat on me. No longer can I

rejoice at these things, they only make me sad. The day has gone by when the walls of a city could be made to fall at the blast of trumpets. Vain seems this kicking against the pricks. My heart is full of the approaching leave-taking, and gloomily I watch the twilight shadows creep up and close around us. I seem to see the relentless angel of fate pointing to the gates of my Paradise, and bidding me depart into the dark unknown region without, and, alas! I may not even take with me my Eve!

Maruscha scarcely speaks a word. She stitches away at the shirt, and when she has finished it, busies herself packing some things for me in a bag. As the shades deepen, Ivan also becomes silent. He goes over to the window, and stands with his back to us, blowing a tune through his lips.

Maruscha comes to me. I fold her silently in my arms, and thus we remain, heart to heart, cheek to cheek.

At length Ivan says, but without looking round, "We had better not let it get too late, Vladimir."

One long, silent kiss I press on Maruscha's lips ere I release her. "Whenever thou wilt, Ivan," I reply, clearing my voice, for it sounds strangely husky.

Hearing Maruscha begin to stir about the room, Ivan judges that he may turn.

Noble, generous brother! it is not in thee to envy. Thy single heart has no place for it. Yet well I know that thou couldst love Maruscha with a lover's passion were she not mine!

He wears a look of gentle apology as he turns, and I know he would fain have left us longer together, but it is not expedient. He has planned everything as he thinks best.

I begin to get into the coat he has brought for me, and he comes forward and helps me, whilst Maruscha stands by and straightens the hat. He takes it from her hand, and puts it on my head, slouching it down in front to almost conceal my face.

My legs tremble so that I sink back to the chair.

I am ashamed for my manhood. I am turned a very coward. My nerves quiver, my pulses fly. I have no control over them. I bite my lip and look helplessly at Ivan.

He takes a flask from his pocket.

"A glass, Maruscha!"

She brings one, and he pours cognac into it, dilutes it slightly with water, and gives it me.

"Drink it, and thou wilt be all right," he says cheerfully. "Thou art still weak, and a small matter flurries thee. It is nothing. Thou takest my arm, and we walk quietly down the stairs, taking our time, and along the Arcade—a short distance. At the end, I hail a droski, and in a few minutes we are arrived at my lodging, where thou wilt go to bed and rest. To-morrow, and every day, Maruscha will come to see thee."

The cognac has indeed put life into me. I rise to my feet again. Maruscha puts up her face and we solemnly kiss each other. Ivan draws my hand through his arm, and Maruscha precedes us to the door.

"Adieu, Maruscha." Ivan extends his hand towards her.

She takes it, and swiftly, ere he is aware of her intention, she lifts it to her lips.

"Adieu, and God bless thee, my brothers!" she murmurs, with eyes brimming with gratitude.

I, holding his arm, feel the shock that thrills his body, but his voice is clear and calm as he replies, "God bless thee also, my sister!"

Maruscha stands watching us as we slowly descend the stairs. At the foot I pause to wave my hand towards her, though her form is swallowed up by the darkness, and we issue forth into the still evening.

I observe that the furrier's shop is shut, but its ferret-eyed owner is outside, standing with his back against the door-post, smoking. He gives us good-night.

We both respond. When we have got out of earshot, Ivan mutters, "Curse that little brute Isajeff, he is always there!"

I reply not. I have enough to do to walk steadily, keeping step with Ivan as I lean heavily on his arm. Very strange and bewildered I feel, too, on the streets after my long confinement within four walls. If I had not Ivan to guide me, I am sure I should run up against the people and objects in my road. My joints are burning with fatigue and the unaccustomed exercise. When we reach the end of the Arcade, there is no droski in sight.

Ivan utters an impatient ejaculation. "Thou must wait here, Vladimir," he says at length, "until I go round the corner of the street. See, thou canst lean against this pillar," indicating one of the supports of the Arcade—"Carelessly, thou canst lean."

"Yes, yes," I reply vaguely. In truth, I scarcely know what I say or do, my head is in such a whirl.

He looks at me anxiously. "There is no help for it," he says to himself. "A droski we must have." Then to me: "Pull thyself together, brave heart! I leave thee but for a minute. There are always plenty of droskis about—just a minute!"

Mechanically I withdraw my hand from his arm, give a lurch, and my back is against the pillar. Ivan throws a glance around, and darts away.

Presently my head begins to clear somewhat now that I stand still. The unwonted motion must have made it spin. I begin to observe and take an interest in my surroundings. Not far from me is a shop that is still open. Cheap, gaudy trinkets are displayed in the window, which sheds a broad beam of light across the gloom of the Arcade. I stare dreamily over at this window, seeing the objects in it without speculation, when suddenly all my attention is arrested by the quick passage of a man through the glow of light—a little man whose head is sunk between his shoulders, who has sharp features, and small sharp eyes, like a ferret—glancing hither and thither as if seeking some one. It is Isajeff, the furrier.

He sees me not where I stand motionless against

the pillar. It is with a sense of relief that I watch him pass on into the darkness, and already there is a sound of wheels.

A droski drives quickly up. Ivan springs to the ground and is at my side. He takes me firmly under the arm, and half lifts me to a seat in the vehicle, gives the order to the "Isvostchisck" and we start off.

"Damn it!" says Ivan, so unexpectedly that I look up startled to his face. He is looking fixedly at something, and I follow the direction of his eyes, and see a figure under a gas lamp, turning up a sharp face.

It is Isajeff!

CHAPTER VI.

"THEY ARE UPON US!"

"VLADIMIR, thou art feeling stronger? Is it not so?" says Ivan, putting a hand on each of my shoulders and looking down anxiously in my face.

"Certainly I am—much stronger than when I came to thee a week ago," I reply, with a smile. "I should find no difficulty now in walking the length of the Arcade. I walk it many times in the day in the room here."

"Because thou wilt have to make a move again," resumes Ivan. "It is no longer safe for thee here. To-day my landlord met me as I left the house and asked me who I had staying with me; though I know not how he has discovered thy presence here. I said: 'A cousin who is merely passing through the town *en route* to Novgorod.' He asked your name. I was taken aback, as thou mayst imagine, but fortunately the first lie led up to the second, and the name of an actual cousin came to me and I pronounced it. So now thou art: Waldemar Nicolaivitch Alikanoff! He next asked to see thy papers, and I said, 'As you will, little father, but my cousin leaves Petersburg to-morrow. I will bring them at

once for your inspection,' and I made as if I would mount to my room. 'Ah, well, trouble not,' he said then. 'If he goes so soon it matters not. Only you know how strict the authorities are at present. It is we landlords who suffer if aught is found amiss.'"

"What hadst thou done had he insisted on seeing my papers?" I inquire, wondering at his temerity.

"The best I could: pretended they were mislaid, and thus put him off until I had got thee away." He laughs lightly. "It is an awkward case, this of thine," he continues. "Thou art in the world and yet not of it. Thou hast no longer a certificate of birth, nor hast thou a name. A passport of residence, therefore, thou canst not obtain."

"I know," I interrupt hastily. A strange feeling of isolation is at my heart. "I am wiped out. I have no habitation here—no name—no business on the face of the earth."

"That is nonsense. Only as soon as possible thou must be out of Russia. Meanwhile, what is to be done for the present? Before to-morrow some safer place must be found for thee." He pauses and muses awhile.

"I have thought, Vladimir," he resumes at length, "that it were well to make known thy existence to our section. Thou knowest they are to be trusted to a man. What joy there will be amongst them when they know thou art alive! They will all be ready to die for thee! And amongst us we can easily conceal thee. Thou canst pass from one to the other until thou art able to venture on flight."

"I have always advised it," I respond. "Long since I would have shown myself to them but for Maruscha. She thinks there is risk in so many knowing it whilst I am still in the country."

Ivan shrugs his shoulders. "I see no alternative. Something we must risk," he says, adding hastily, "though I see no risk in it. There is strength in unity, and are we not as one man in purpose?"

He takes up his hat. "The sooner thou art away from here the better. What thinkest thou of going first to Pavel Yégorevitch?" he asks.

"I would trust Pavel as my own soul!" I reply fervently, for I like the man. He is a silent, deep nature—I always mistrust the glib of tongue—a man who makes no professions, slow and deliberate both in speech and action, but having once chosen a course is not to be turned from it. There are those amongst us who bluster and talk much and are ready to rush impetuously, thoughtlessly, even to certain death. Inferior heroes these, who must be wound up to a state of frenzy ere they can act. The true hero is he who first deliberates, then acts after mature consideration. Such a one is Pavel Yégorevitch Klendovsky. A friend of such stuff will prove as true as tempered steel!

"Thou wilt lock thyself in," says Ivan, from the door. "And if any one, save Maruscha, should come and knock for admittance thou wilt keep silent as a shade until they depart. Adieu, I will not be long."

He goes, and I turn the key and throw myself on the bed. My mind is perturbed and I would think.

A few hours hence more than a hundred men and women will know of my marvellous escape from the grave. They will come to me one by one, to look on me and greet me with joy and exultation. And I am but human; my soul, in spite of having touched the skirts of Eternity, is not above appreciating the good opinion of my kind. They deem me a hero because I acted well the bravado, and made a virtue of necessity, yet undeserving as I feel of their adulation, I am weak enough to like its flavour. It is a pleasant thing to be a centre of attraction, and already my heart swells in anticipation of the fervent clasp of hands; the moistening eye beaming on me. Yes, it is sweet to have the approbation of kindred spirits.

Kindred spirits? No more! Henceforth our

ways must lie apart as wide as are our opinions. Never again can I enter into their schemes and take my place in their foremost ranks! It is as if a new soul had entered my body—a soul whose every aspiration is alien to that other one. That old soul was wild, untamed, impetuous, passionate. The desire of this one is to possess itself in peace and quietude. To creep away to some quiet corner of the earth, there to engage silently and single-handed in the battle with self, that peradventure I might attain to some degree of that moral liberty which alone renders a man fit to be a leader of men. I look back now with bitter regret on the life that lies behind me. Blind leader of the blind, making mad, unavailing rushes at an enemy in the dark! How many useful lives have I led into quagmires where they have perished miserably, whilst I alone of all the host have scrambled back to firm land again! I stand now on the verge, and look back, thinking what a fool I have been! And I stand alone! Fresh hosts are crowding up, and when they hear of my existence it is to me they will look for leadership. They will strive to retain me in their midst: they will long to hear my voice as formerly, inspiring them with burning words to dare and do, and my tongue must be silent. I could almost regret this change in my sentiments when I think of their disappointment, but that my judgment approves it. Yet why should I disappoint them? Why grieve them with an explanation they will not understand? Surely the greatest kindness would be to leave them in ignorance of my defection, as they would deem it, until by degrees my future life may interpret to them my views, or if that may not be, may they return with me into silence. Not even to Ivan will I speak of them. Only Maruscha, my other, my better self, shall know and share them.

As I lie, with my hands clasped above my head, thinking these thoughts, my eyes fixed on the bit of

sky gleaming grey through the small dormer window, the being of all others I most long for stands at the other side of the door. I know well Maruscha's particular rap, and it is her voice that whispers my name:

"Vladimir!"

I spring to my feet and hasten to admit her.

For some minutes, holding the beloved form in my arms, I forget all else, realizing only the rapture of the present. Only when she releases herself and looks round for Ivan, I remember how much I have to tell her.

She turns white when she hears about the landlord's questions, and I tell her that Ivan has gone to seek Pavel Yégorevitch to make arrangements for my removal there to-night.

At this she clasps her hands. "Is it well—oh, is it well that others should know about thee? Pavel is silent and trustworthy, it is true; but still I fear me. It will leak out. One by one they will be told—they will be flocking to see thee. The attention of the police will be attracted. I wish, I wish Ivan had come to me! Surely we two could have managed to conceal thee somehow—somewhere!"

"Thou art too fearful, my Maruscha," I reply soothingly. "And thou seest it has become imperative to seek the aid of others. I only wish I had insisted on doing so before I drew this danger on Ivan. And as to my safety, there is not a man of them who would not render up his life rather than betray me!"

"Not willingly, not wilfully, I know, Vladimir, but what matters it when they have by their coming and going, attracted those bloodhounds to thy hiding-place? It is a mistake, I tell thee!" persists Maruscha.

For a while she stares straight before her, and I see the anguish of terrible possibilities growing in her eyes until the tears begin to gather, her features to work, and she casts herself on my breast.

"Vladimir! Vladimir!" she cries. "If they tear thee from me now I shall die!"

I say what I can to reassure her, stroking her

bright head and pressing my lips to it, for her hat—that sweet little hat that I have watched her trim—has slipped to her shoulders. And she sobs out her woe with tears abundant, at which I rejoice, because experience has taught me that after Maruscha has wept much, she is wont to be very calm.

My expectations are not disappointed. In less than a quarter of an hour we are sitting hand in hand, talking quite reasonably together.

"How long wilt thou stay with Pavel Yégorevitch?" she asks.

"As short a time as possible," I reply. "I am quite strong now, and the sooner I begin to make for the frontier the better. By remaining I only endanger my friends to no purpose. Moreover, Maruscha, as I explained to thee before, having ceased to approve of the methods of the party to which I have hitherto belonged, my wisest plan is to escape from it, quietly and silently. I have thought it out, and to attempt any explanation would be madness. I could not make myself understood."

Maruscha sighs as if she would excuse me to herself.

"Surely thou hast done enough," she murmurs.

"By no means!" I cry vehemently. "No man can ever say: 'I have done enough,' in a good cause! Once its true disciple, his liabilities to it end only with his life, and my watchword is now as heretofore, 'Liberty.' And it is for liberty that I will fight to my last breath! No longer, therefore, can I be the slave of a party whose tyranny is as great as the Czar himself! It is Nihilism I have served—slavishly, abjectedly. What it has decreed I have done, silencing my conscience—smothering the dictate of the Divine voice within my heart which would have whispered: 'Thou shalt not take God-given life, even though it be that of thine enemy!'"

"Then thou wouldst have us bear the cruel, undeserved lash like slaves—like dogs!" Maruscha cries, her eyes flashing fire. "Shall three parts of a

nation lie grovelling at the feet of a fourth, simply because that fourth part has the power and the brutality to misuse it? Shall we not rather rise as a man and take our own—the individual liberty which is ours by Divine right?"

"Ah, Maruscha, if they *would* rise as a man! But they are two parts asleep, and desire not freedom, and the other part is too sudden and headstrong, defeating their object in precipitate action. Believe me, when we Russians are fit to rule ourselves the lash will fall from the hands of tyranny. It behoves us now to possess our souls in patience, working on ourselves, and giving as little occasion as possible for offence, then when we are ready for it, we will get what we want without bloodshed—it will come to us. Were we to succeed now in wresting the rod of iron from the tyrant, we should quarrel for it amongst ourselves. It would be an exchange of tyrannies. It is a difficult, almost an impossible problem to solve, this of the liberty of the individual. How is it to be defined? How bounded? Can any member of any community be said to be free? We are weak and dependent animals, we humans; to be happy we must live in communities, which must of necessity be governed by laws, and laws bind and restrict. Concordia, methinks, rather than liberty, should be the watchword of humanity."

During my speech I have been furtively watching the varying expression of Maruscha's face. It is a rare study. When I say that it is beautiful I speak dispassionately. It is a fact that the dullest eye must recognise, for it is as fair as a lily, lighted by orbs large and lustrous, and blue as forget-me-nots. In repose its expression is one of infinite gentleness; yet in a moment—at a word it will change, the rosy child-like lips will meet, the fair cheeks glow, the delicate nostrils dilate, and the eyes will flame with the enthusiasm of a Joan of Arc. A strange, nervous energy seems to possess her at such times, and I

think this gentle lily maid when so possessed would be capable of leading the broken army of a forlorn hope.

I have watched this strong emotion grow and intensify in her face, and marvelled at the wonder of it. Gradually it has faded. Her lips part, her blue eyes take a look of vagueness and uncertainty as they slowly turn on me.

"What wilt thou do—when thou hast left us?" she asks, with quivering lips.

"God only knows! Thou speakest as if I could choose," I reply, with a touch of bitterness. "A stranger and an alien in a foreign land, should I reach it, my prospects are *nil*." Then noting the effect of my gloomy observations, in her downcast woe-begone features, I hasten to add more cheerfully, "Nevertheless, Maruscha, I have my hands and my head, and being willing to make use of either as opportunity offers, I shall surely find work to do."

"Could I but have gone with thee!" she cries, with a heaven of tenderness, a world of regret in her voice. "Could not I?"

"It were impossible, my heart of hearts! Thou wouldst but retard my flight, increase my danger, and more than all run a terrible risk thyself. Nor couldst thou endure the hardships I may have to encounter. Alone thou canst follow me by rail, in perfect safety, and we will trust in my lucky star that soon I may bid thee come. Meanwhile, what thou hast to do for my sake is to keep a brave heart, and avoid getting embroiled with the Nihilists. Keep thyself apart from them and let not thyself be drawn into their schemes. Wilt thou do this for love of me, my Maruscha?" In reply she takes my hand in both of hers and presses it to her lips.

Whilst we have been talking the shades of night have been closing in, until now, leaning together as we sit, we can barely see each other's faces. Maruscha rises to light the lamp, and in the silence I hear how the wind, which has been blowing a gale

all day, is rattling the window in its frame and howling wildly round the house. From a gale it has developed to a tempest.

"Ivan will see thee home, Maruscha," I observe. "It is a wild night."

She pays no heed to my remark, but at mention of Ivan: "Ivan—is he not long in returning?" she says.

"He may not have found Pavel Yégorevitch at home," I suggest, yet I, too, begin to wonder at his long absence.

Maruscha moves about the room, setting it in order. It seems always to pain her when things are out of place. She cannot rest until her surroundings are in harmony with the order of her sweet mind. And what her hand has touched seems to be transfigured into something it was not before—something worthier, more significant, as if by the touch of a fairy's wand.

When all is to her satisfaction, she deliberately opens one of Ivan's drawers and takes from it some socks; finds, I verily believe, with pleasure, a hole in the heel of one, and producing from her pocket certain implements of housewifery, she sets to work, to fill the breach with deftly woven threads.

That, too, is accomplished, and she is pairing and rolling up the socks, when flying steps startle us, ascending the stairs! The handle of the door is shaken, and a breathless whisper, which is not Ivan's comes to us:

"Open—open quickly! It is I—Pavel!"

Maruscha, pale of a sudden to the lips, is at the door before I, in my surprise and consternation, find the power to stir. I sit gazing and expectant of I know not what, but something of ill—and Pavel is before me.

He must have sped quickly, for he puts his hand to his heaving side, and with wild eyes darting at me, gasps forth:

"Hide! Hide for thy life! They are upon us!"

Maruscha wrings her hands. "Fly! fly! My God! stand not thus, Vladimir!"

I am beginning to make blindly for the door, when Pavel's voice arrests me:

"No—no time; they will meet thee—thou must hide!"

I look round at the four walls and laugh stupidly.

"Hide? here!" I say.

"The window—it is dark!" It is Maruscha who speaks, pointing upwards.

"It is a chance," gasps Pavel.

The window rises from the roof. It is high. Already Maruscha is dragging forward a chair for me to mount.

"My shoulders—better," gasps Pavel again, instantly turning to me his back and lowering his body.

Something of their anxious energy is lent to me in this supreme moment. I spring with marvellous agility to the proffered shoulders—I open the window, and with a rush of wind comes to me the tramp, tramp of gendarmes!

The wind compasses me about—it tears, it roars at me. I clutch the window-frame—my feet are on the sloping roof, which seems to move away under them. In my desperation I feel disposed to let myself go. I should break my neck. What matter? It is a worthless one, bringing nothing but trouble to all connected with it. Then flashes on me my recent marvellous escape from the jaws—nay, from the very bowels of death, and I tighten my hold fiercely, resolving that if I must part with this gift of God, my second life, it shall only be if He wills it so. To do less would be like throwing His precious gift back in His face! Pavel's head shoots up for a moment through the window. I see the wind seize his black hair and toss it about in wanton fury ere it disappears and the window is shut. I have now got a firm grip of the projecting slates that edge the dormer roof, and for the present I am secure. Fortunately, too, I am shod with soft slippers, so that my feet can

bend with them and get a certain purchase on the slates, which with strong boots would have been impossible. I move cautiously sideways, until I can extend my left arm over a corner of the projection. Thus by bending my body forward I can see into the room, myself unseen.

Maruscha is sitting at the table with a sock drawn over her hand. Her eyes are turned to the door, as if in startled surprise. The picture she thus presents is a tranquil, an innocent, a natural one, though I, who see her with the deeper vision of my soul, know all the agony of mind, the wildly beating heart, the unspeakable anxiety that calm exterior hides.

Miserable wretch that I am to be the cause of so much suffering to her! Pavel is at the door, holding it open to admit four police officers, two of whom have Ivan in custody. Pavel's manner is perfect. His eyebrows are raised. He looks astonishment personified. With a polite gesture of the hand towards the interior of the room, he seems to invite the intruders to enter, search, examine—anything they like, so that they are satisfied.

There is an air of baffled mystification on the faces of all the officers as their glances travel about the room. One of them, a superior, locks the door and puts the key in his pocket.

Ivan, standing apart, with gyved wrists, wears a look of sullen indifference. Only once I catch him dart a swift glance at Maruscha, who has risen to her feet and stands with proud, uplifted head in mute protest at the unseemly interruption.

The superior officer steps forward in front of Pavel, and holding him with a stern eye, evidently commences to question him. I strain every nerve to hear what is being said, but what with the incessant bluster and swish of the wind and the intervening glass, I cannot distinguish a single word. I can only guess what is transpiring by a close observation of the dumb show.

Pavel fixes steadfast, unflinching eyes on his examiner. Occasionally he smiles slightly. His lips move as if in prompt reply. Presently he takes out his pocket-book, produces a card from it, which he hands to the officer. Then Maruscha's turn comes.

My brave girl! She bears herself like an outraged queen. I can see that her manner impresses the officer—Russian officers are particularly impressionable!—she would impress the Czar himself! The fellow bows courteously at every reply of hers. He takes down her address and name on the back of Pavel's card, and makes her a profound and final bow ere he turns from her.

"Curse him!" I think. "He would go through the same insipid genuflexions were he conducting her to the scaffold."

She sits quietly down and speaks not again, but silently watches every movement of the officers, who, inactive during the examination, have now got orders to prosecute a search. They pull out drawer after drawer, upsetting the contents on the floor, while the superior stands by, looking on.

The bottom drawer is the only one that is locked, and Ivan is commanded to give up the key. With perfect unconcern he directs one of the officers to his waistcoat pocket, and—ah, at last here are papers! I note the gleam of exultation with which they are clutched, and the eagerness with which they are unfolded; glanced over with increasing disappointment, one by one, and laid aside. I could almost chuckle at their discomfiture, knowing, as I do, that Ivan has another hiding-place, and one that they are not likely to stumble on, for his secret papers.

They leave no corner, probable or improbable, uninvestigated, and it occupies a considerable time. Now they are pulling the bed to pieces—examining and feeling the mattress; and whilst they are busy a sudden panic of dread seizes me that before they go some of them may think of the roof.

Of this I have been convinced from the first, that it was not in search of seditious papers they have come here to-night, but for the surprising of some fugitive political offender, whom they have been informed by Isajeff, the furrier, lies in hiding at the lodging of the law-student, Ivan Ivanovitch Kolinsky. In such case the only wonder is that they have not thought sooner of the roof.

I glance around me in an access of agitation—up the slippery incline of slates, exposed to the full fury of the wind. If I could have clambered to the other side I should be safe, but it is out of the question. To loose my hold for a single instant would be to be hurled at once to the street below and killed on the spot. Yet where I now crouch anyone opening the window could not fail to see me that moment. And oh, my God, if I am taken, it is not myself alone who will suffer!

The sweat of intense mental anguish stands on my brow. Here I dare not remain; to let go my hold is death, and my dead body in the street will condemn the others!

I commence moving, by painful inches upwards, drawing my hands one after the other along the edge, until by a random swing of my right arm I hope to grip the pointed summit of the dormer roof. I risk all on the success of this attempt, and—succeed! Had I missed, I should have fallen backwards.

The other arm soon follows, and I can draw my body up until I lie pressed flat and close to the dormer roof. It is the best I can do. Here I may chance to escape detection. It is a vague chance. And here I remain in palpitating suspense.

In the pause of the wind I can hear slight noises in the room below me,—the pushing of a chair—the falling of something to the ground—the drone of a voice.

My heart beats so violently, so audibly against the slates that they seem to beat in unison with it, heaving up and down in regular pulsations. I could

almost fancy myself lying on some mighty steam-propelled machine.

Whether minutes or seconds throb themselves out thus—for every beat the condensed anguish of an ordinary lifetime—I know not, as I lie on my cheek, staring with smarting eyes, at the place where a head might appear. Yet though I have been expecting it momentarily, when the faint click of the window latch falls on my ear, and the head is actually there, defined distinctly against the sky, I get such a shock that I start violently and hear myself audibly gasp.

The head moves round until the face is turned on me! The eyes pierce the gloom! I give myself up for lost!

Again I meditate letting go my hold, as die I must! It is only for an instant. No, even though death—a certain one this time—on the gallows is before me (and I have tasted and fully realised all its horrors), by no act of mine will I hasten the moment of my dissolution. Strange, the man utters no word, and yet I could swear that he sees me! He looks away up towards a stack of chimneys that cast their shadows over my quivering body.

Of a sudden an exclamation escapes him. I see his cap torn from his head by a gust of wind and carried high in air. He watches it until it is swallowed of the darkness, mutters an oath, and disappears.

Is it possible that I am undiscovered? I cannot believe it, and lie expecting another head to appear, to hear a voice commanding me to descend from my hiding-place; but time goes by on heavy, fainting wings, and the window remains closed.

And that, at last, is the tramp of the police officers below in the street, growing gradually fainter, until it dies in the distance. I breathe a prayer of thanksgiving.

It is Maruscha's small head, blown about by ringed wavelets of hair, which next starts up against the sky, and her voice gasping out my name in an intense, awful whisper:

"Vladimir!"

She cannot see me, her gaze sets out on a distracted, dubious search. I raise my head. She utters a low cry of joy.

"I am here, Maruscha," I call to her.

"Ah—h—h!" What a long, deep sigh of relief was that which rose to my sweet love's lips!

Then, "Oh, Vladimir, be careful! Hold fast! Take time!"

She stretches out her hands towards me though she cannot help me, whilst I slowly and painfully descend. Once my foot slips forward, and she utters a scream of terror.

I reassure her. "Fear not for me, Maruscha. I keep a firm hold, and holding I cannot fall."

And once more I stand in the room, and Maruscha's arms are clasping my neck.

CHAPTER VII.

WHITHER?

AROUND me is a chaos of confusion. Ivan's belongings strew the floor like the leaves on the strand after a tempest. His open desk, with its contents scattered broadcast, is at my feet; his bedclothes lie a twisted heap, with the mattress, beside the bed. The table, too, is littered with old letters, manuscripts, note-scraps relative to his law studies; but where is their owner? Where is Pavel Yégorevitch?

"They have been taken," I groan, a huge wave of bitterest remorse rising and sweeping over my soul. Have I returned to this miserable world only to bring misfortune to those who are dearest to me? Am I ever to be doomed to blast like a thunderbolt all I come in contact with? To prove a curse where I most would bless.

Maruscha, who now that the fierce strain has been removed from her nerves, is sobbing hysterically,

with her head on my breast, lifts her tear-stained face at my words, anxiety for me bringing her sobs to an immediate check.

"Yes, they have both had to go, but it is a mere form. To-morrow they will be released. Nothing was found, nothing can be proved against them," she hastens to inform me.

I laugh harshly. "Hast thou forgotten Vera Sassulitch?" I say. "There was nothing found against *her*—nothing but the faintest shadow of a suspicion rested on her, yet that hindered them not from keeping her two long years of her girl's life in the fortress without trial! And she was scarcely eighteen!"

Maruscha hangs her head and sighs drearily. She replies not. What can she reply to this cruel fact?

There is a silence. We are both struck mute for a space with the leaden weight of our thoughts.

"I need scarcely ask of what they accuse our brothers," I observe, at length, with bitterness. "It is not the manner of the Russian authorities to prefer an accusation when they arrest a subject. It is enough that they have decided to drag him to prison, and well for him if he is not left to rot there!"

"They made no accusation, it is true; but, from their questions, I could guess that they expected to find—must have discovered—that someone was hiding—being hidden."

"It is as I thought," I interrupt. "That malignant devil, Isajeff, is at the bottom of it!"

Then instantly, with a shock of dismay, I recollect that it was from Maruscha's lodging Isajeff had followed us! Yet she is here—she has not been arrested with the others. He has spared her; it is due to his reticence that she is not now in a prison cell! Why has he spared her? My brain reels as I contemplate the only possible reason this foul wretch can have for acting as he has done—to have her in his power! Deprive her of her friends and hold a hideous threat over her for his own vile ends.

And I—oh, my God—I am powerless to protect her from him! Nay, I must fly from her—hasten to put miles between us, for every moment that I remain at her side I imperil her very life!

I grind my teeth in an access of impotent fury. I clutch the air with a wolfish hunger to fly at the throat and crush the life out of this insignificant yet noxious reptile.

It is a full minute before I find my speech. When it comes, it is so low and level that Maruscha suspects not my murderous state of mind.

"Maruscha," I begin, "this Isajeff—has he ever accosted thee?"

She bends her looks to the ground, and I, intent on every sign her face may disclose, observe the vivid colour rise, dyeing her neck, her cheeks, her brow.

"I like not the man, Vladimir. He is an impudent fellow——" she hesitates. I grasp her arm almost savagely.

"Has he dared to speak to thee?" I gasp. "Tell me—tell me, what has he said? If he has insulted thee by so much as a look—a word—I will go now, at once, and tear the tongue from his throat!"

My vehement words are scarcely uttered ere I am regretting them, for I see the fear spring to her eyes. And now she will not tell me the truth. She laughs uneasily.

"Now, see how thou takest things up!" she says. "For indeed there is nothing to tell. The man has always been civil to me, only giving me 'good-day' as I went and came, or passing a remark on the weather. It is only that I have taken an unreasonable antipathy to him—a quite unreasonable and unjustifiable antipathy, Vladimir. Thou knowest my strange temper! And thou art wrong," she continues, in nervous haste. "Assuredly thou art wrong that Isajeff has informed the police. Why should he? And how could he suspect——"

"He watched us leave thy lodging. He followed

us along the colonnade. We both saw him as we mounted the droski to come here. He has driven after us—spied on us—crouched at our door——"

"Why, then, am I here?" she interposes. "If, as thou sayest, he observed thee leave my lodging, why am I not also under arrest?"

"The devil and his own black heart know why!" I answer, with grim significance.

She reads my meaning, and the colour flies affrighted from her cheeks, leaving them hueless; her whole countenance turns white, and blank, like snow ere it has been kissed by the rosy lips of Dawn.

"Now thou knowest thy enemy; he is waiting, lurking even now to pounce on thee—by God!" I choke with rage.

I make a rush to the door. Maruscha flies to me, she clings to me—drags me, or tries to drag me back, with all her slender force.

"Wouldst thou lose us all?" she whispers wildly. "Listen, listen to what I would say to thee, and then go if thou wilt."

The imploring anguish of her tones compels me, and I pause, though my desire to slay Isajeff is not diminished. Now I perceive how my violence has terrified her, and my blood-thirstiness gives some place to compunction.

"I will tell thee," she pants, "what I will do; only—only give me time, Vladimir." She presses her hand to her side.

I am subdued. To soothe her, calm her, undo the mischief I have done is now my only thought.

"My sweet love, forgive me!" I beg. "I have frightened thee!"

She smothers bravely a storm of rising sobs, still holding me with both her small hands until she has sufficiently controlled herself to speak. "I need never go back to my lodging—he need never see me again," she begins, watching the effect of her words with wide eyes fastened on my face.

"Go back," I repeat, thrilling with apprehension at the mere suggestion. "Thou wilt go from here to Olga Petrovna's, and quit not her lodging save to go to the station and take train for thy home! Petersburg is no place for thee henceforth, Maruscha. Promise me that thou wilt leave it to-morrow never to return."

"I promise—but—but—I owe a week's lodging—I must give notice—my clothes!"

"And thou wouldst take into consideration such paltry matters where so much is at stake!" I cry, beside myself.

"Listen to reason, Vladimir," she falters. "If I pay not my landlord he will have an excuse for instituting a search for me. Thou art so violent that I cannot get in a word. I will go to Olga, and she will pay the money for me, and bring away my things."

"So that he can follow her and find thee! No, that will not do! And yet," I say, moderating my tone, "thou art perhaps right about the money—" I muse a moment, "then Olga must find some one else to pay it, and invent some lie. He must be led to expect thy return. Say that thou hast been called away suddenly—to a dying relative!" I laugh grimly at the glibness of my inventions. "She has been commissioned to pack part of thy wardrobe to send after thee. Thou canst give her a line for the scoundrel to that effect."

"Yes, yes," Maruscha agrees eagerly. "That is well planned. And as proof that I am returning everything will be left standing in the room—my stove and all my belongings."

I nod. "Yet thou must not linger a single day in Petersburg, Maruscha. Dangers beset thee here at every turn. The police know thee to be a friend of suspects; they have thy name and address——"

"How knowest thou that?" she interrupts, in surprise.

"I saw all through the window. I did not move to the dormer roof until the search was almost completed."

"My God! Vladimir, if thou hadst not moved!"

A sharp thrill of horror shakes Maruscha's body. She stares straight before her, and I know that she is living over again one terrible moment of agony. Presently she throws herself into my arms, and clinging to me convulsively, hides her face on my shoulder. "How was it that I fell not dead when he opened the window," she breathes. "And I screamed not—I moved not. It must have been that the pitiful good God upheld me then!"

I strained her to my heart—my heavy remorseful, most miserable heart, drained now of every drop of happiness. Not even Maruscha's love brings me a ray of consolation, the gnawing consciousness of the suffering, the dangers our love for each other is dragging her through bows my soul to the dust. And there is no help for it, we are inseparable, our beings are knit together, our hearts are one. Not even the powers of heaven could avail to wrench them apart, for well I know that if they called my soul hence hers would swiftly follow.

"Would that we had never met!" I groan involuntarily.

Maruscha starts up and gazes at me in wonderment.

"Wouldst thou rob my life of so much happiness, Vladimir?" she cries.

"Our love has brought thee only suffering," I reply woefully. "And I see not the end of it."

"God forbid!" Her face lights up with Divine tenderness. "I would not, since it is well past, lose the memory of one moment we have suffered together! These dead woes are all unspeakably dear to me, for out of each has sprung the living joy that thou hadst been marvellously spared to me! And how doubly sweet have seemed those glimpses of happiness we have had between the times of trouble. If only we could have endured together to the end!" The light dies out of her face. "It is the future I dread, when thou wilt be far from me, and I shall not know what is befalling thee, when all will be darkness and uncertainty."

A great sob chokes her utterance. I make an effort to shake off the gloom that is possessing me to speak to her words of comfort. "Hope, hope, my Maruscha," I murmur. "Think always of my escapes —how I have been preserved and rescued from the very arms of death, as if snatched thence by the hand of Almighty God. Believe that there has been purpose in it, and that the protecting hand will still be over me until every danger has been tided over."

Something of hope returns to me as I speak. I brace myself to the parting, for there is no time to waste, and it must be now. I begin gently, but firmly to unclasp her hands, which have fastened themselves round my neck.

"Thou wilt be strong now as thou hast ever been, my brave one!" I say encouragingly. "Something tells me our parting will be brief. And I will write to thee here, *poste restante*—it will be better so—as soon as I am over the frontier. Olga will forward my letters."

She stands before me, looking up at me with wistful eyes, as if striving to make out my meaning, yet answering never a word. I like not her looks and meet them not, but hasten to get her mantle and hat. I hold them towards her.

In a moment her features begin to work, and ere I am aware she has cast herself at my feet, and is clasping my knees.

"Thou canst not mean it, Vladimir!" she gasps. "Thou wouldst not drive me from thee before—before the last! And whither wouldst thou go to-night? Where wilt thou hide? Oh, leave me not in ignorance, or I shall go mad!"

I lift her to my arms again. "Maruscha," I say firmly, "Thou seest the mischief I have already wrought. I have resolved that it shall be enough, so help me God. I will ruin no more of my fellow-creatures by forcing myself on them. Thou wouldst not wish it? I leave Petersburg to-night. So now,

since it must me, give me one kiss and leave me, like the brave girl thou art!"

I raise her face, but she only clings to me more closely, and fixes on me a look of such moving appeal, that I am fain to turn from it, as I tremble for my manhood. Then again that broken pleading voice:

"Let me stay with thee and help thee, if thou wilt—if thou must go to-night. Deny me not this consolation—the last. I swear to thee I will not utter a single plaint nor shed a tear if thou wilt let me stay, Vladimir, and thou sendest me from thee now I will—I will die on the street."

What can I reply to this but "stay"? To insist further would be cruel; indeed, were I to do so in the overwrought state of her feelings, though she might not die, she would certainly be made seriously ill. I reflect, too, that for some hours at least we are tolerably safe. The old man who occupies a room on the same stair will be lying insensibly drunk long before this hour in the evening, and even if such an unparalleled circumstance has occurred, and he is still in a state of consciousness, he will never trouble his poor, old dazed head with ever such a vague surmise as to what may be transpiring outside his own vodki-reeking den. The landlord, who is a commission agent, was starting on one of his journeys when he stopped to question Ivan in the morning, and will not be home until midday to-morrow. There is just his wife and two young children in the house besides, and the Dvornik. The former lives separated from the rest of the house, and never holds any communication with the lodgers; the latter, from his kennel near the street door, will have probably seen the arrival of the gendarmes, have heard the stir, and watched their exit from the house with their prisoners. Well, he may wonder to see one more leave the house than he expected, but there is no danger to apprehend from him.

When I say to Maruscha, "Be content, thou shalt

have thy way," she gives me a solemn, grateful kiss, and a great calm descends on her. At once she takes the initiative, pushes me gently into a chair, and hastens to place such food as she can before me.

"First thou must eat," she says decisively, and I offer no objections, for God only knows when and where I may get another meal!

I eat heartily of the bread and ham she places for me, and drink the whole of a bottle of beer. Meanwhile, she bustles about seeking clothes for me to put on—a pair of stout boots, a coat, a felt hat of Ivan's. She also fetches his razor and puts a pair of scissors ready to hand, moving swiftly and silently. When I have finished eating, she stands ready to cut my hair; and, like a second Samson, I am speedily shorn of my locks. For one moment, her task done, she regards me, and softly laughs.

I have no time to think for myself, for she think and acts on the thought so quickly. Already she is handing me the razor. The water and soap stand ready; and she is holding a small mirror where the light of the lamp may fall on it.

"Now thou must shave."

The operation of shaving is perhaps the last a man would care to have his sweetheart assist at. The situation, even at this moment, strikes me as ludicrous. It is certainly extraordinary, but I am getting hardened to extraordinary situations. I grasp the razor, look up once into Maruscha's eyes to exchange with her a smile, and square my elbows to the task.

I have hitherto been proud of my strong, curling beard and heavy moustache: in a few minutes they are no longer mine—they lie on the table before me, and I am staring blankly at my changed aspect in the glass.

Again my eyes seek Maruscha's: I meet them fixed with wide amaze on my face.

"Vladimir," she says at length, "thy own mother would not know thee!"

"And thou?" I ask, with a pang for my departed glory. "Wouldst thou not have known me, Maruscha?"

"Of course I would!" she replies, her eyes softening to infinite tenderness, under my anxious ones. "But truly it is surprising the difference in thy appearance. No disguise could be more perfect."

She puts the mirror back on its nail against the wall, and proceeds to make sandwiches of the rest of the bread and ham, putting them up in several parcels, which she deposits in my coat pockets, whilst I am drawing on Ivan's boots. Fortunately he has a large foot for his size, and the misfit is on the right side.

Maruscha is done first, and she comes and stands in front of me.

"When we part, Vladimir," she begins, with an effort to subdue the tremor in her voice, "where wilt thou go first?"

"Westward—I will keep moving westward towards the frontier," I reply promptly. "Of course I must be guided by circumstances as to—to details."

The fact is, I have not formulated any plan of action, save that of getting out of the town as quickly as possible and ridding my friends of my dangerous proximity. To ease Maruscha's mind, however, I talk away glibly enough, arranging my ideas as I go along.

"I am under no apprehension but that I shall make my way over the frontier without a single difficulty," I continue cheerfully. "It is simple enough. In an hour I shall have left the town behind. I walk until I am tired, then I enter a wood and rest on the soft pine-needles, Maruscha, where I shall be snug and retired. There I sleep off my fatigue; I rise refreshed and strengthened, and proceed on my way. I could not have a better time of the year for a journey on foot, the days are fine and still warm, yet not too warm. The country air and the freedom will invigorate me."

And "when thou art hungry—what then?"

There is a kind of dry anguish in Maruscha's tone, and I am glad that I am still occupied with the lacing of the boots so that I need not look at her.

"Oh, there are plenty of ways of getting a meal," I reply carelessly. "I can work for one—chop firewood, or what not, for a well-to-do peasant."

"And he will not wonder that one of thy class—for thou canst not conceal that thou art a gentleman, Vladimir—should come to his door and offer to labour like a moujik for a meal? He will suspect nothing?"

I hesitate. "And if he *should* have suspicions," I reply at length; "every Russian is not minded to set the police on a doubtful character."

"And if he should ask to see thy papers?" Maruscha stands over me, wringing out my reluctant responses with the ruthlessness of an Inquisitor, regardless of my mental writhings. And now I must straighten myself, for the boots are fastened and she is facing my perplexed regard with looks that search me through.

"Papers—ah, well, of course I have no papers to show; but—oh, bother, Maruscha!" I take sudden refuge in assumed impatience. "Now, is it likely that every one I chance to meet will ask for my papers? Not one in a thousand would do it!"

"Yet anyone thou askest for a day's work has a right to demand an inspection of them. What wouldst thou do if it were to happen?" she persists.

"Hem—well, in such case I would get out of it the best way I could!"

Maruscha compresses her lips until they are bloodless. Her delicate nostrils dilate and quiver. She takes out her small purse and empties its contents on the table. One by one she smooths out the rouble notes and counts them. There are eight. Then she counts the little horde of silver.

"Eight roubles and seventy-five copecs, that is all I have with me!" she sighs. "That will not go far, yet it is better than nothing." She puts it back into her purse and holds it towards me.

I draw back. "No, my beloved, ask me not to take thy last coin," I say, feeling the blood rush to my face.

"Vladimir, thou surely wouldst not hesitate at such a moment!" she exclaims, in a grieved tone. "Alas, that it is so little!"

I see that I dare not insist. I try to make a compromise.

"Since it will make thee happy, let us divide it."

"If thou takest not all I will break my word to thee and weep!" she cries, with a fierce knitting of her brows, as she thrusts the purse into my hand and closes my fingers over it.

After this, what can I do but kiss the dear little faded purse, which she values as my first gift to her, and consign it to my pocket! And what a grateful, tender look is that with which she rewards me! Thus will I remember her!

"In a moment I will be ready," she says, as I rise and button my coat. She is dashing about, putting all suspicious signs out of sight, sweeping up the hair, and after selecting a lock, burning the rest in the mouth of the stove, everything so swiftly and thoroughly. When all is done she throws on her outdoor garments, and stands prepared to accompany me.

She is perfectly calm, though there is not a trace of colour in her face. It wears a set look of determination, and is lighted strangely by her steady, shining eyes.

I take up Ivan's old hat with a keen pang ot sorrow for its owner.

"Give me a small coin, Vladimir," whispers Maruscha. "I have thought of a plan to manage with the Dvornik."

Whilst I am producing the coin, she continues: "It is certain that when he hears a foot descending the stairs he will look out of his room to see who it is; so I will go down first and stop and speak to him. Presently I will seek in my pocket for a *pour-boire* which I will not be able to find. At length I shall

ask leave to enter his room to approach the lamp, and will manage in doing so to close the door behind me. I shall be long in finding the coin, and shall thus hold his attention in greedy expectation whilst thou wilt steal down past the closed door and out into the street. There thou wilt hurry away to the right until thou hast turned the corner, and wait for me."

"My clever one!" I murmur.

She encloses my hand in a firm grasp and turns out the lamp. I hear her draw in her breath as one might do before taking a plunge, as she leads me to the door—turns the key, opens boldly, locking the door noisily behind her; then she leaves me and trips lightly down the stairs.

I creep forward and peer down over the balusters. There is a gleam of light across the narrow entrance. A bullet head is thrust into it from the Dvornik's den. Now Maruscha appears in it, with smiling visage.

"Ah, you are there, Matei! Is your mistress at home?" she inquires.

"The mistress is at home."

"I would give her this key."

"Why have they taken Ivan Ivanovitch and the other one?" asks the man curiously.

"It is nothing—a misunderstanding," replies Maruscha, carelessly. "Ivan Ivanovitch, I doubt not, will be back to his lodging in the course of to-morrow, if not to-night."

She begins to search for the coin.

"Bah, my pocket has got twisted! I would give you"—she fumbles vainly—"a trifle to get some tea."

"My gracious lady is too good!" interposes the Dvornik, eyeing her movements greedily.

"Well, that is stupid!" Maruscha laughs. "Find it I must, for indeed it is there," she says gaily. "Excuse me, Matei, I will just step to your lamp."

Matei quickly makes way, preceding Maruscha into the room.

I am on the top stair as the light is suddenly shut off.

Maruscha is indulging in a merry peal of laughter at her own expense. She keeps up an unbroken string of remarks in a voice raised far above its ordinary pitch.

I steal swiftly down. The stairs creak under my heavy boots, yet on I go, confident that the man hears nothing save Maruscha's tongue—thinks of nothing but the probable value of the coin that so obstinately refuses to come to light.

"Here it is at last!" I hear Maruscha exclaim, as I am shooting past the door. "It is not much, but you are welcome to it."

And I hear no more, for I am in the street, with the wind whistling in my ears.

It is a strange sensation this, of the free air rushing about me—no walls to encompass me! The long, unwonted space bewilders me, and I must ever be putting out a hand to touch the houses, thus to keep straight my course.

I have not long to wait round the corner of the street. Maruscha comes on me like a small whirlwind, and seizes my arm convulsively in the gloom.

"Thank God thou art here and he has neither seen nor heard thee!" she sobs.

I look fearfully around to make sure that no one is near. Not a soul is abroad this wild night, though the world has not yet gone to sleep, for from many a window shines out a warm glow. Now the wind bears to us the booming strokes of the clock of St. Isaak telling the hour of midnight. There is silence between us for a few minutes. I hold Maruscha's two hands in a fervent clasp as I look down into her white, upturned face, and swallow drop by drop the bitterest cup that cruel fate ever pressed to the lips of man. To bid farewell to the woman I love with every fibre of my being, knowing not when, if ever, we may meet again, is bitter indeed; but to be compelled to go from her side when danger besets her—danger of which I am the author: to know the enemy and yet withhold my avenging hand, lest I

whelm her also in destruction, is like swallowing a draught of the burning lake of Hell.

A great, woeful sigh recalls me to the present, and the necessity for self-control. I take Maruscha in my arms and steady my voice for a final injunction.

"I have thy solemn promise, Maruscha, that thou wilt not linger a single day in Petersburg? Thou wilt certainly return to thy home in Tichven to-morrow?"

"I promise thee, Vladimir," comes the trembling response. Then drearily: "What will they say to see me home before I have taken my certificate? They will never cease to question me. Ah, it will be wretched! But thou wilt write?" she adds quickly, as if snatching at this straw of consolation.

"Yes, I will write whenever I can. But, Maruscha, I must also hear from thee. I will make for Luza first, write to me from thy home to the post office there."

"How shall I address thee?"

"Ah, yes, I forget that I am nameless! I will keep the name that Ivan gave me to the landlord—it will do as well as any: 'Waldemar Nicolaivitch Alikanoff.' Thou wilt remember?"

"Waldemar Nicolaivitch Alikanoff," repeats Maruscha, slowly.

"And for Heaven's sake, word thy letter carefully, so that if it reaches me not and the officials open it they will see nothing to make them suspect aught. I will observe the same caution in writing to thee and will sign my assumed name."

"I will be careful," she murmurs, with another heart-broken sigh.

"And now, my own Maruscha, farewell until our next meeting—our joyful meeting to part never again! Think of that, only that, my love, and the time will seem short."

"Oh, Vladimir!"

Her arms are about my neck. I hear her labouring heart throb against mine. A long, last kiss. My anguished soul invokes the blessing on her that my

quivering lips refuse to utter, and I tear myself away.

One look back I take to see her totter a few steps after me with arms outstretched, and stop.

I wave my hand and flee as if lashed by furies from the sight of her agony—forward—onward—into darkness and uncertainty.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEW EXPERIENCES.

WHERE am I? I halt and gaze around me in stupid bewilderment. The east is glimmering in cold, silver sheen, throwing an uncertain, mystic light on the faintly defined landscape. There is a deep ditch on each side of the dusty road on which I stand; and beyond, stretching far as the eye can reach, a drear expanse of parched bog, tufted with rank grass, interspersed with stunted shrubs. A strange humming noise in the air makes me look up to see rows of telegraph wires vibrating above me. A pungent smell of bog-myrtle is borne to me on the wind as it sweeps towards me from the west, hissing through the scrub. Somehow that smell takes me back—ah, it must be a hundred years ago!—to a certain morning in my boyhood, when I had risen with the summer dawn to wander with my canister strapped to my back in search of plants. The wind was blowing then as now. Just such a light lay on the land—all, all the same—only I am different!

Ah! I shiver. A drop trickles down my face, and I become aware that my clothes are clinging to my body. It has not rained. I have not been in the river. No, I have been tramping eternally against the wind that has been striving to drive me back; and that buzzing noise has been always in my ears.

I look back along the straight, white road with its tall telegraph posts starting up at regular intervals.

A sudden flash like a golden needle pierces the dim distance. A ball of gold begins to burn lower down on the horizon. They are the spire of the Admiralty and the dome of St. Isaak's in Petersburg, which I have left behind me. Can it be possible that I have come so far? It has been weary work trudging along that road! Latterly it has seemed as if my feet were manacled. How they smart and burn!

I would fain sit down in the ditch and rest me, but I must not; I must press on, for yonder black line in advance is a wood where a soft carpet is spread for me on which I may fling myself and sleep without fear of curious eyes.

I take out my handkerchief and wipe the drops from my face, with, oh, what a woful stab of dolorous recollection, of the touch of Maruscha's little fluttering, solicitous hands as she put the handkerchief into my pocket. In returning it, my hand comes in contact with a parcel of sandwiches. Again Maruscha! I draw them forth, for I am ravenously hungry.

How neatly the little packet is folded! How daintily the sandwiches are cut! My love! My love!

I eat with a vision of her, as she stood at the table in Ivan's room, forgetful for the moment of her grief in ministering to my needs, her sweet, pale face downcast and absorbed.

In spite of the bitter regret that is mingled with it, the food stimulates my exhausted frame, and I plod forward.

The dawn is brightening, swelling up the heavens with a stir and rustle of her silver-skirted robes as they sweep the land. She wakens the little russet-coated birds, who pop out in her rear and shake the dew from their feathers. And the boisterous wind seems cowed, and gradually lies down at her feet.

Broken-spirited as I am, footsore and weary, I lose not a single sign, for I have ever loved to mark these things from boyhood, and have felt their soothing influence, which fails me not even now.

Soon the diamond shafts of the approaching sun shoot up to the zenith, and the features of the earth tremble with a faint, expectant smile. The first hawk hangs quivering in the air. A hare darts across my path with ears laid back, followed, one by one, by a family of young ones. I note the familiar weeds that clothe the ditch at my side. With what avidity was I wont to cull them! They look up at me now with their golden and violet eyes, in their mute loveliness and grace, like familiar friends.

And now he comes, with a burst of glory, the mighty, omnipotent sun—the creator! Filling all space—turning millions of dull germs into things of life and beauty, to swarm the air, the floods, the earth. Thank God, it is still mine to see the sun!

At last I am treading the margin of the wood—am entering its stately aisles. And now that effort is no longer imperative, my limbs begin to yield under me. I stagger rather than walk, catching at the boles of the trees for support. Yet a few steps farther into the shade—a mist rises before my eyes. I lurch forward—prone on the ground, and become instantly oblivious. . . . .

An incessant tapping over my head is the first thing I am aware of. I open my eyes in vague curiosity and see the dark, interlacing branches of a pine-tree above me, and lower down on the red stem, a green woodpecker diligently at work. I watch him lazily for a space with a pleasant sensation of ease; then my eyes begin to wander downwards to settle on the active manœuvres of a ground spider, who is weaving his dextile threads amongst the leaves of a dropwort. From thence my gaze roves to a clump of brown-seeded rush-grass which a level shaft of sunlight is illuminating.

The sun is low. What may be the time, I wonder?

From force of habit I insert my fore-finger and thumb in the watch-pocket which was wont to contain a watch, and am withdrawing it wth a foolish,

baffled laugh, when my finger comes in contact with some small object. I dive for it and pull up a watch-key; but that is not all; it is tied with a bit of blue ribbon which is attached to something else. Another pull and I bring to light—Maruscha's tiny watch!

It is there, in the palm of my hand—the little toy of a thing she has worn at her girdle ever since I have known her. I gaze at it with such a mighty rush of emotion that my whole body thrills as with a sharp shock of electricity. I could almost believe that it is a living, palpitating thing, as I listen to the swift beatings of its golden heart, whilst its shining face seems to smile up at me like a veritable messenger just descended on my hand direct from my incomparable Maruscha! I press it passionately to my lips, and forgetful of my situation, I lose myself in thought of her, until the sun on its march to the horizon gleams through a gap in the trees direct into my eyes. I start up and perceive that the tiny monitor I am gazing at points to the hour of five. I wind it up, and returning it to where the tender, subtle fingers had placed it in preparation of a surprise for me, I scramble to my feet.

The long, profound sleep in the invigorating atmosphere of the sun-steeped pines has put new life into me. It is only my feet that are swollen and painful, and I hobble, rather than walk, to the margin of the wood. If I can but get a lift of any kind to the nearest village, I think I will take a bed at an inn for this one night to give my feet a chance of recovering, free of the incumbrance of confining boots which they have for so long been unused to. I stand and look up and down the interminable road.

In advance there is a long cavalcade of carts laden with firewood winding slowly into the distance, each with its attendant Mujik trudging beside it or seated on a shaft of his cart. Towards me a pedlar's waggon lumbers on creaking wheels. Its owner sits nodding on the box, framed in the open-

ing of the canvas tent that arches above him. The two little nags crawl along with drooping heads as if they, too, were indulging in a nap. I take a good look at the pedlar.

He is a middle-aged man, with a strong, grizzled beard and broad, Slav countenance. The nose in it is like a potato—not ornamental, but neither inquisitive nor cunning. There are good-natured creases about the corners of the eyes; in fact, good nature and stolidity seem to predominate in the fleshy expanse, so I take courage.

"Hem!" I cough.

He looks up with a start and becomes aware of me.

"Good day! God assist you!" I exclaim amicably.

The pedlar instantly removes his cap, while a slow smile gradually spreads over and broadens his heavy features.

"God be with you, Gentle," he replies.

"Whither are you bound?" I question.

"My destination is Kovno, but to-night I make halt at the village of Little Kolga."

"Ah, that is my way. Would you object to give me a lift for a compensation?"

"The Gentle will honour me!" The pedlar leaps down from his seat with as much alacrity as his lumbering body and enormous boots will permit.

"Would the Gentle like a seat on the front of the waggon, or would he prefer to recline on the merchandise?"

"With your permision, little father, I will get inside," I say.

As I advance to mount the waggon he remarks on the lameness of my gait. "The Gentle has hurt himself?" he observes.

"My boots cripple me somewhat," I reply carelessly.

"That is bad, if the Gentle has far to go."

"I go to Luga. I am a student and have been sitting rather closely over my books, so I thought the

walk through the country would clear my brains a little." I laugh.

"The Gentle is right," agrees the pedlar. "There is nothing like the country air for bracing the wits, or helping one to think out a weighty matter. I make all my calculations in the open. The Gentle will feel the benefit of it even though he should be obliged to continue his journey by post from Little Kolga. He will still inhale the fresh air. Meanwhile I should advise him to take off his boots and make himself comfortable."

I gratefully comply with his advice, and wonder what he is about, as I watch him put the reins under him so as to leave his hands at liberty, and produce from a receptacle under the box an earthen mug, a flask, and a bundle of native tobacco. He leisurely shreds some of the latter into the mug and pours on it a small quantity of liquid from the flask, which my nose informs me is vodki. This he hands to me.

"If the Gentle will rub his feet with this decoction he will find it soothing," he observes.

The man's kindness touches me. "You have robbed yourself," I say. "How shall I thank you?"

"Not so," he replies cordially. "If I give the Gentle ease, I am surely more than compensated for the trifling loss!"

There is silence between us for a few minutes. I rub my feet with the lotion until it is all absorbed. They glow and tingle pleasantly, and I experience considerable relief. Meanwhile my well-meaning companion is lazily filling a monstrous china-bowled pipe with native weed, and is soon filling the tent with its stifling, musty fumes. Slowly he puffs, but in hugh volumes that envelop me and almost choke me. But not for worlds would I make any audible demonstration of discomfort to mar the complete enjoyment of so good a fellow. And how he enjoys it! I rest my chin on my hand to observe him. His eyes are almost invisible. A languid, sensuous

expression floods the wide expanse of his face. By degrees the puffs become shorter and less frequent. His head, with its black sheep-skin cap, droops lower, lower, until it rests on his breast, and he sleeps.

I turn on my side. My couch is soft and luxurious, yielding to my body, which the motion of the waggon gently sways, and I, too, fall into a dreamless slumber.

I wake to the uncomfortable sensation of a parched tongue and a gnawing at my vitals. The former I must endure for the present, but the latter I can allay with the rest of the sandwiches. I take them out and look towards my friend, who sits placidly blinking on his perch, droning a tune.

"Have a snack, little father?" I say, presenting the parcel.

He rouses, and the sluggish smile creeps about his features as he turns towards me.

"Ha, the Gentle is awake? He has slept well! But he does me too much honour. Shall I indeed eat with the Noble?"

He takes a sandwich in his brown, hairy hand, and eats it in two bites, yet I cannot persuade him to take another.

"It is enough," he says. "God give the Gentle good digestion!"

And he will not be behindhand in hospitality. Again he gropes under the box to bring forth a huge stone bottle. He extracts the bung with his strong, yellow teeth, and lets out the sour, refreshing odour of quass. The dry morsel sticks in my throat whilst I watch his proceedings with inexpressible longing.

He pours out some of the brown liquid into the same vessel in which he had mixed the lotion and holds it towards me with the words, "Unless the Gentle has something better, a draught of quass will wash down his supper. It is dry work eating without a drink."

I thank him profusely and drain it with avidity. A sigh of relief escapes me as I return the mug. "I was indeed as dry as dust!" I exclaim,

He also drinks, taking off his cap and wishing me health.

After this I propel myself to the mouth of the tent and we converse together.

I find my companion, though heavy-tongued, yet full of sly humour.

He has many stories to tell of exchanges and dealings in horseflesh, in which he always figures as the conquering hero after the manner of my countrymen. My laugh rings out frequently on the still evening air, as if I had never known a care. He is evidently gratified at having so good a listener, and draws the long bow valiantly, like a true son of the Czar.

At length he seems to have exhausted his stock of marvellous commercial achievements, and suddenly changes the topic by the abrupt question:

"Has the Gentle ever been to a hanging?"

I feel the blood rush tumultuously to my smooth-shaven, tell-tale face. "A hanging? I—hem—no, I have never seen a thing of the kind," I stammer.

"Perhaps the Gentle likes not such spectacles? I never miss a chance. I like to see perish the enemies of our father the Czar."

The pedlar lifts his cap.

"When I last visited the city, I went to see a hanging. There were five of them—five gallows in a row, and a man for each. Ah, that was a sight! There were thousands went to see it, and I went early and secured a good place. There is courage in us Russians, even in the worst of us. We know how to meet death. They were traitors all, but they died like brave men. I assure you, rascals as they were, my heart glowed to witness how they died! There was one—my God, what limbs the fellow had! He was nobly built, the dog, and he had a face as handsome as a saint. Such a beard! Such eyes, dark and burning! I could not take my eyes off the fellow. I saw only him all through the hanging. And when he spoke, his words were

like arrows: 'I repent not,' he said, the sinner, yet he was a brave one."

He looks straight before him as if conjuring up the scene, and continues: "And what an affair that was! Shall I ever forget it? The rope broke ere he was finished. Holy Father! the screams, the hisses, the yells! I was carried off my feet, for the populace in their rage rushed forward to effect a rescue. Surely the Noble must have heard of it?"

"Ah, well, I doubtless heard it spoken of at the time, but I take little interest in such things."

"No? Yet there are always students at the hangings. There were many at this one. There was one close to me went clean mad at the breaking of the rope, and made a rush, but the soldiers drove him back. He had his sweetheart with him, and she fainted. It is abominable that delicate women will go to see these sights! They scream and faint, and yet they like it. They will not stay away."

I answer nothing. I have an unpleasant feeling as of a rope being tightened about my neck, checking the free course of my breath. I take out my handkerchief and mop my face with it.

"The Gentle feels it warm under the cover," observes the pedlar. "Will he not sit awhile in the front of the waggon for change of position?"

I gladly scramble to the front of the vehicle, where I sit crouched like a grasshopper, because of my height. The pedlar regards me from head to foot with twinkling eyes, and at length breaks into a laugh.

"I crave pardon," he says, "but just such a frame had that sturdy rascal who perished on the gallows. Just such length of limb and breadth of shoulders; yet methinks he was stouter," still observing me critically. Then doubtless perceiving how I colour under his fixed gaze—for again my rebellious blood mounts in spite of me to the very roots of my hair—he adds quickly, "The Noble has a splendid body, and so had the fellow I speak of,

but there the resemblance ceases. God forbid that I should give offence!"

After this he relapses into silence and whips up his horses, for the light is fading from the sky in which the evening star is brightening. We soon begin to pass a smoke-stained cabin here and there by the roadside, and then a long, low wooden building, with benches and tables before the door, where we make halt. He throws the reins on the horses' backs.

"I put up here," he says, "and I thank the Noble for his good company; there is good accommodation at the post station, not five minutes' walk from here."

I thank him for his kindness and slip a rouble into his hand. He begins to expostulate, but with a "good-night" and a wave of my hat, I turn from him to ascend the unpaved, straggling street which constitutes Little Kolga.

CHAPTER IX.

A BLACK SHADOW.

THE aspect of the country has changed since I set out from Little Kolga one early morning nearly a month ago. Then the birches stood clad in pale green, now they are decked in pure gold. The moors have deepened in colour until they glow in red and purple, and many a waxen bell-flower has given place to a variety of gleaming berries, which invite me to many a repast. The birds no longer flit in pairs amongst the branches, but congregate in dense flocks on the plains, and in the still twilight the whirr and faint cry of the passing woodcock is heard. And I, too, am changed, for even as the face of nature has grown ruddy and brown in the quickening air and genial sunshine, so also has mine. Like a forest tree my frame has hardened and strengthened, and with it my mind has cast out nervous

fear and become calm and strong. Since I got Maruscha's letter at Luga telling me that she is at home and safe, I am imbued with hope and confidence, which has intensified from day to day as I have journeyed on, associating myself with all sorts and conditions of men by the road and at the inns where I have halted, without meeting with a single misadventure. No one has ever seemed to entertain a doubt that I might be other than a travelling student, and so far I have succeeded in sustaining the character, not having had occasion to ask for work. By dint of reserving my money for food alone, I have eked it out even until now. Nothing has passed my lips since I quaffed the friendly pedlar's quass, save black bread and an occasional bowl of sour milk, or wild berries and a draught of spring water.

It is wonderful how little a man wants to keep a healthy body and soul together!

Never but that one night in Little Kolga have I slept in a bed. My couch has been of heather under the open starlit sky, or of soft pine needles under forest trees, save when I have ventured to creep into some outhouse out of the rain; and I have thriven with it all. Only my clothes have deteriorated; they are shabby and travel-stained, and my boots have begun to let in the daylight.

And now I am actually in the Government of Kovno, getting very near the frontier, and my first difficulty is staring me in the face. I have noted its approach every time I have had occasion to take out Maruscha's little purse to pay for a frugal meal, and calmly philosophical, I have thought:

"When the time comes, I will find a way."

It has come. The landlord of the inn before whose door I sit has just received on his dirty palm my last ten-copec piece. I have no longer the means to purchase satisfaction for my obtrusively healthy appetite when it shall next begin to clamour. I am nothing daunted, however; the unsuspicious good-

fellowship of pedlar and peasant, farmer, artisan, or tax-collector, has inspired me with such hardihood that I picture myself undismayed approaching some homestead and smilingly telling the proprietor the droll case of how my money has run short, and asking him to let me earn a meal.

With my mental eyes turned on the situation, I absently take in my surroundings with my physical ones. The long-legged pigs grubbing with pointed snouts amongst the yellow garbage in the cabbage garden; the geese feeding on—God only knows what—on the bit of stubbly land, not more than half an acre square; the road before me with its deep ruts and holes mended here and there with pine boughs; the low wooden houses on each side with their balconies more or less dilapitated; a baker's shop with painted sign dangling over the door, on which are depicted on a pale blue ground a yellow "pirog" and three loaves of different complexions and shapes, and towering above all, the clumsy church with its white walls and pea-green roof. The scene is a familiar one. I have seen it scores of times during my wanderings from village to village, for thus are they all, with trifling variation as to the disposal of the same objects.

I have avoided towns as much as possible, but to a town am I now bound, having told Maruscha in my last letter to write to Kovno. The landlord has just informed me that it lies twelve versts from here; I shall therefore be in possession of my letter in a few hours.

I rise and stretch myself, take up a stout alder stick that I cut at the beginning of my journey, and start at a steady pace up the street. Soon the last wooden hut is passed; the innumerable patches of reclaimed land, and again the trackless wastes of bog and moor stretch away to right and left, over which the sparrow-hawks quiver eternally. I am in exuberant spirits; thus as I swing along the road, I break into a song Maruscha has often sung to me.

"Hallo, brother! Be merciful!" exclaims a voice from the ground. I abruptly stop singing, and looking down perceive that my stick, which I have been swaying from side to side, has narrowly escaped striking the head of a young man who reclines on the side of the ditch. He blinks up at me with a foolish, maudlin smirk, and I at once perceive that he is not sober.

"I beg your pardon," I say, lifting my hat without halting.

"Hallo, stop! Wait for a fellow, little brother!" cries the man, as he scrambles out of the ditch.

The request affects me disagreeably; I want to get on, and prefer my own company to that of a drunken—what? not a Moujik, nor a *commis voyageur*, nor a peasant farmer. What then?

He is dressed in a light summer suit of no provincial cut, though soiled and spotted with grease. His hands show white through the dirt on them, and on the little finger of the left is a costly ring, a thick gold snake with a diamond in its head. His boots are of patent leather, such as are worn by Petersburg dandies, and his creased and disordered cravat is of white silk with a blue sprig.

He has struggled to his legs and stands before me, a repulsive-looking object, with his sloping shoulders, his thin, blotched face, from which protrudes a sharp mean nose, looking as if the point had been dipped in red ink; and he winks his small red-rimmed eyes incessantly, and looks at me with an inane, vacant grin.

"You might have put out my eye there, my friend," he observes, shutting up the left and cocking the other at me.

"I might, indeed," I respond, "for until you spoke I saw you not. Again I beg your pardon."

"I accept your apology, brother," he says condescendingly, and planting his feet very far apart. "And now may I ask your destination? Kovno? Eh?"

"Yes, I go to Kovno."

"Ah, that is luck; I go there also, so we can proceed together. The devil take it, what think you to see a gentleman like me going on foot the distance of twelve versts? I have been cheated, robbed, my friend, of all the money I had in my purse—five hundred roubles, that is what I had when I left Petersburg. Gone! all gone! not the price of a postchaise left! The world—this Russia—is full of liars, and cheats, and thieves; you cannot get a glass of cognac but it is adulterated, and knocks a man stupid, and then the rogues bring out the cards, which are stocked,—all stocked, I tell you! An honest man has not a chance."

He spits upon the ground and thrusts his hand through my arm.

"Well, devil take it, let it go! Help me along, brother, and I will pay you for it; by God I will, when we get to Kovno. My uncle is Governor of the Province. I am going on a visit to him. He is rich; the devil he is!"

He swaggers along, stretching his short legs to their utmost capabilities in order to keep step with me; yet I attempt not to adapt my walk to his, and preserve a glum silence in my vexation, whilst I curb my longing to shake him off my arm.

"What is your business?" he asks presently.

"I am a student," I reply shortly.

"What faculty?"

"Medicine."

"Taken your degree?"

"Yes."

"Studied in Moscow?"

I have it on my tongue-end to answer in the affirmative, but why should I lie without reason, like a peasant?

"Petersburg," I say.

"What, Petersburg! The devil! I, too, am a Petersburg student!"

I at once regret having spoken the truth.

He stops short and stares at me. "Let me look at you, brother!"

Then shaking his head—"No, may I be hung if ever I saw you before!"

He still stares, and his jaw drops until his open mouth takes the form of the letter V. "And yet, I have seen someone like you—somewhere."

I look at him steadily. "Quite possibly; you may, after all, have seen *me*."

"The devil, I must have seen you!"

Suddenly he slaps his leg. "By all the saints!" he exclaims, "I know now. I went to see some fellows hung once, and one of them, the ringleader, had the look of you! Not so much in the face—the fellow was bearded, older-looking, and of a fairer complexion. Oh, he looked quite other, and yet there is a something—something in the *tout ensemble*—the height, and God knows what, but you remind me of him. Perhaps you remember the case? Everybody talked of it at the time. They called the fellow I speak of Vladimir Alexandrovitch Lubanoff."

I thrill to hear my name thus mentioned; nevertheless I am sufficiently master of myself to reply with perfect composure:

"Yes, I remember—all the particulars."

"And know you what they are saying now? That he was not hung properly, that his friends stole his body from Professor Schleemann, who had purchased it, and resuscitated it, and that he is at large. There is a big reward offered for his recapture. It is even suspected that the Professor himself helped to resuscitate him, and to effect his escape. Yet, on the other hand, the window of the cellar where the body had been placed was shattered, which speaks in favour of its having been stolen."

"An extraordinary tale," I observe drily. "Rather too miraculous, methinks, for the nineteenth century."

"Well, well, not so very miraculous, either, considering how they hang in Russia. Disgustingly

unscientific! They string them up like dogs, I tell you. Why, at this very hanging the ropes snapped —oh! they all snapped!"

I know how much of this is true, but say nothing, and presently he resumes:

"He was a fine fellow, that Vladimir Alexandrovitch, and you are a fine fellow, and may the devil take me if I let you go until I have made well your acquaintance. We will have a good time together in Kovno. I will stand treat. My uncle——"

"Thanks for your good intention," I interrupt, "but I remain not in Kovno, I am merely passing through."

"By God, but you will remain—you will remain a week, at least. Now I have caught you, my brother, I will keep you."

He fairly hugs my arm, the little brute!

"We will have a good, a glorious time, I tell you! What champagne my uncle has in his cellar!" He smacks his thin, fishy lips.

I begin to see that I have an awkward customer to deal with, who must be humoured; so I abstain from arguing the point with him, whilst I determine to escape from him on the first opportunity.

"You are too good," is all I say.

"Good? I am a good fellow! God knows, my enemy would say that for me!"

He rattles on in the same boastful strain, hanging so heavily on my arm, and impeding my progress, that I wish the devil he talks so much of would relieve me of him.

Meanwhile the exercise in the fresh air gradually sobers him; and as the cognac he has drunk loses its hold on him, the fictitious strength it has lent him declines. He talks less, and finally not at all, having enough to do with puffing and blowing. I pretend not to observe, and stalk on. At length he gasps out:

"The devil! what a fellow you are! I—may the devil take me if I can go another step!" He puts his hand to his side—"Completely blown, hang it!"

He has pulled me up, still hanging to me like a leech. I regard him with a smile.

"You are soon spent," I observe.

"Merely a trifle blown," he pants. "Ah, I am a devil of a walker—when I am in my usual——You see me—at a disadvantage. The fact is—I took some cognac. Bad stuff, faugh! Poison!" he shakes himself.

"If I only had a thimbleful of good stuff to pull me right again, I would spin along. Holy Father, how I would step out! I would let you see what I am made of. You have not such a thing about you, have you?"

"No, I have not, or you would be welcome to it."

His mouth immediately falls to the shape of a V.

"Bah! that is devilish bad," he says gloomily. "Well, come, let us sit down. What is all the hurry? We are not walking for a wager. Why should we blow ourselves this way?"

"I am not in the least blown," I reply, "and excuse me if I decline to rest with you, I must get on to Kovno with all haste. I have business there." Which is true, for I want to be in time to get Maruscha's letter this evening.

He lets go my arm and stares at me, whilst his nose seems to grow sharper, and the red rims round his eyes to deepen.

"What? have I heard aright?" he says—"you would leave a brother thus, in this devilish, awkward predicament?'

"I have no choice, I am obliged to proceed. But look you, take my advice, wait here until some vehicle comes up and bargain for a lift, you can pay when you get to your uncle's. You have only to say that you are the nephew of the Governor."

I finish not my sentence, for I see coming towards us, in a cloud of dust, a large "calash" drawn by four horses. My companion, too, is not listening. He has started forward, and is peering in the direction of the equipage, with his hand arched over his blinking eyes.

"By all the saints, it is very like—yes, it is my uncle's calash!" he exclaims.

"That is well, then I have the honour to wish you good-bye," I say, moving quickly away.

"No—good Lord! leave me not! Stay and help me out of this! What will he think to find me thus? There is no place to hide! Oh—ah, help me to some lie! You are a fellow-student—both fond of walking—fine day—back me up, brother!"

I bite my lip and pause irresolute. To be thrown into the company of the Governor of the Province, to have put to me, God knows how many questions, is about as dangerous a position as I could well be placed in, considering that I am travelling under an assumed name and have no papers. Yet if I decline to remain, I shall make an enemy of the obnoxious individual at my side, who would certainly lie about me, and might get me into trouble through false representations, which would inevitably lead to the discovery of facts. There is nothing for it, then, but to meet the inevitable with a bold front.

"I will stay," I reply. "You may rely on me."

He wrings my hand, and proceeds to mop his face with a dirty cambric handkerchief; after which he pulls down his waistcoat, straightens himself, and already the cloud of dust is receiving us.

"Ah, my uncle, I thought I was not mistaken! I knew your trotters at a glance. I hope I see you well, Vasili Grigorievitch!"

He utters this in a shrill voice, with his hat in his hand and with repeated ducks of his head.

The sole occupant of the carriage, a thin, sharp-featured man of middle age, dressed in uniform, who sits stiffly upright, his back against the cushions, leans forward when thus addressed, peers at the speaker with half-shut eyes, raises and snaps a *pince-nez* across the acute bridge of his nose, and looks again to make sure that his short-sighted eyes have not played him some trick, then exclaims:

"Mon Dieu! Is it possible? My brother's son, Andrei Piotrovitch!"

"Yes, my uncle. I am he! Ha, ha! You have expected me for some days; but not thus, not now!"

"I have looked for thy arrival every day for a week! And now what is this? I meet thee here, on foot and in this plight!" The Governor waves his hand towards his nephew with an expression of deep disgust.

"Ah, yes, that is just it, a plight! Walking on a dusty road improves not one's appearance. Ha! ha! I feel quite disreputable. But it is only on the surface, my uncle. You see, I am passionately fond of walking in the country, and the day is so fine, I could not resist. A freak—a mere freak, and now I have had enough of it. My friend—hem—" he pauses and coughs, and I know that he only now remembers that he cannot present me, not knowing my name—"Yes—as I was saying, my friend here was just complaining of fatigue when you came in sight, Vasili Grigorievitch."

"The lying scoundrel!" I think, yet I dare not contradict him, and stand silently enduring the severe scrutiny of the Governor.

"Hein!" he nasals at length, and withdraws his eyes.

"Where are thy effects, Andrei Piotrovitch?" he inquires of his nephew.

"Sent in advance, my uncle; they will arrive before us, God willing!" replies Andrei Piotrovitch, instantly. Truly he needs no assistance when it comes to telling lies!

"Hein!" ejaculates the Governor again. And to the man-servant who has descended from the box: "Yeremei, open!"

The carriage door is held wide.

"May I pray you to ascend, monsieur!" The Governor is addressing me, though he is looking past me.

I resolve of a sudden to make at least an attempt to avoid this threatening strait. I raise my hat and say calmly—

"I thank your Excellency, but I am really walking from choice, therefore beg to decline your courteous offer."

I feel that the keen, contracted eyes are swooping down on me and measuring me from head to foot before the words come slowly—

"Ah—indeed, you are fond of walking, an accomplished pedestrian, and doubtless a true votary of Nature. I congratulate you on your good taste, sir!" then to his nephew, "Yet I understood thee to say that thy friend had complained of fatigue, Andrei Piotrovitch?"

I expect Andrei Piotrovitch to call God to witness to the truth of his lying assertions, instead of which he says—

"Said I so, Vasili Grigorievitch? Surely not? You must have taken me up wrong. I said that *I* was fatigued. I could scarcely say so of my friend —hem—Ivan—hem—Ivan Feodoreivitch." Here his uncle's gaze being removed from him, the perverted jackanapes winks and makes a grimace at me. "Ivan Feodoreivitch," he repeats with emphasis and another wink, "can walk his fifty versts a day as easily as you can take a pinch of snuff, my uncle!"

It is evident to me that since he is comfortably installed in his uncle's carriage and the embarrassment of the meeting is tided over, Andrei Piotrovitch would not be sorry to part from me. I can be of no further use to him, and to be obliged to maintain with a stranger the semblance of a close intimacy would only be troublesome. It is well. Thus he assists my design.

"Indeed! A manly accomplishment," observes the Governor, making me a stiff bow. Presently he asks me: "Are you making any stay in Kovno, Ivan Feodoreivitch?"

I wince at the name the young fool has fathered me with, and to which I am compelled to answer: "No, your Excellency, I am merely passing through."

"Ah, well, if we are not to have the pleasure of

your company, Ivan Feodoreivitch, I have the honour to wish you good-day," and the Governor raises his cap with another stiff bow, to which I respond.

"*Au revoir*, Ivan Feodoreivitch!" exclaims Andrei, with an audacious grin.

The man-servant shuts the carriage door, swings himself to the box, and in a few moments I stand alone in the road. "God be thanked!" I murmur, with a sigh of relief.

I step out after this, and the verst-stones crop up quickly one after another. As I pass each, I think to myself, with increasing satisfaction: "One more verst nearer to Maruscha!" And notwithstanding a growing sensation of discomfort in the region of the stomach, I feel happy. The sun is still a couple of hours' journey from the horizon when I enter the suburbs of the town. Before I have advanced a hundred yards I meet a police officer, who seems to regard me curiously. I like not police officers, and I wish this one "good-day" in passing, on which he salutes me respectfully. Another hundred yards and I meet another, who also appears to be strangely interested in my outward man. Politeness costs nothing, I think, as I greet him also, and have the satisfaction to observe that his manner of responding is deferential. I advance into the town until the houses begin to take the form of streets, and I feel the round boulders of the pavement under my feet. Then I ask my way to the General Post Office of a respectable-looking citizen.

I am directed to the usual square, flanked on all sides by Government buildings, over whose entrances hover the spread eagle, in the centre of which rises an equestrian statue, probably of Peter the Great. I am presently entering the Post Office. In ascending the steps my eyes rove up the street, and are arrested by the sight of the two officers I met in the suburbs, who are just turning the corner together. They both look towards me.

Well, there is nothing extraordinary in two gendarmes walking together, nor is there anything remarkable in the fact that they happen simultaneously to direct their eyes towards me. But it is strange that they should have turned and followed me, for when I met them they were both walking in the opposite direction.

Bah! it is accident—pure accident, I think, shaking myself free of the vague uneasiness that is creeping on me. There may be a score of reasons for their return to town. And I push open the swing door of the "Left Letter Department."

"A letter for Waldemar Nicolaivitch Alikanoff?"

"Yes, there is one." The clerk hands it to me, and my fingers close with a thrill of joy on the precious missive. All is well! is well! my heart sings. I spring down the steps and have gained the street, when a hand is put on my shoulder and withdrawn, and I see before me the police officers, one of whom addresses me courteously—

"You are a stranger in the town, I believe, sir?"

"Yes, I am a stranger to Kovno; I am passing through the town," I reply, looking the man steadily in the face. Fortunately he cannot see my flying pulses.

"Exactly. I am sorry to have to trouble you, but we have orders to inspect the papers of travellers passing through the town. It is a mere matter of form, we need not detain you many minutes. The Police-Inspection Department is just across the square if you will have the goodness to accompany us."

The man indicates a large stone building opposite.

It costs me a supreme effort not to groan aloud, and my voice shakes as I stammer—

"I have not my papers here. Would it not suffice if I present myself with them to-morrow?"

Alas! as I put the question I know the futility of it. Like an unfortunate fish with a hook through his gill, every struggle but confirms my fate.

"I regret to say that it would not," replies the

officer. "Under these circumstances we are bound to place you under arrest until your papers are forthcoming. If you will instruct us where they are to be found, they will be procured for you without loss of time. Your effects have been sent forward to some hotel and your papers——"

"I have no effects—here," I interrupt desperately, whilst before my eyes all objects begin to dance to the throbbings of my brain. "How could I presuppose such a contingency as that—that I should be stopped in the street and my papers demanded!"

I am talking nonsense, but I must say something. I see how the men exchange significant glances.

"And you left them behind you?" queries the gendarme, with a dubious elevation of his eyebrows. "A strange mistake to make, since every Russian knows that it may save both delay and unpleasantness if he carries with him the proofs of his identity when travelling. I must say that it is an extraordinary oversight on your part, and one that you must answer for to the Prefect."

"Well, it is no use parleying about it," roughly interposes the other officer. "The man must come with us. That is the sum total." And he lays his hand on my arm.

"I will go," I say with a gasp, and grim despair digs its cruel talons deep into my, ere while, so joyous heart.

"The gentleman is quite willing to go with us and set this little matter right," observes the polite officer, and he quietly strokes his companion's hand from my arm, taking his place on my other side.

I still hold Maruscha's letter crushed in my fingers, forgetful of it in this moment of perplexity. I am reminded of it by its dexterous withdrawal.

"Permit me," observes the polite officer.

He raises it to his eyes and slowly reads the address aloud: "Waldemar Nicolaivitch Alikanoff." He bows towards me as if a third party were in the act of presenting me to him, "A good name. A good Russian name!"

"I have not read that letter, it is from my betrothed," I say, choking down my indignation. "Will you permit me to read it? Surely it can make no difference so that you retain it in your possession?"

"My duty is to place it in the hands of the Prefect unopened," is the response. "If there is nothing treasonable in it, he will return it to you."

The cold sweat breaks out on my brow. "Oh, Maruscha! Maruscha! God in His mercy grant that thou hast not compromised thyself!" I inwardly groan.

Meanwhile, with a gendarme on each side of me, I have crossed the square and am entering the police offices. We traverse a succession of dirty rooms, furnished with little else save desks and spittoons. At one of the desks a solitary young man is engaged making entries into a ledger. He raises a sallow face, and stares at me as we pass. Otherwise the offices are deserted.

At length we enter a small ante-room and stop at a door at which the officer who seems always to take the initiative, knocks.

It is torn open instantly, and an irate head is thrust out, surmounted by a military cap. A fierce head with coarse black hair standing off it, wide eyes, dilated nostrils, and a bristling moustache that stands out like the whiskers of a tom-cat.

"What now?" exclaims this individual. "No use coming to me! I have nothing to do with it. After business hours—Going home to dinner. Should have been gone an hour ago!"

The gendarme draws him aside and whispers to him.

I strain my ears to catch the purport of the gendarme's remarks, but only hear: "The Governor," "Petersburg," and the name "Andrei Piotrovitch."

Only three words, yet they are enough to inform me as to whom I owe my arrest, and the knowledge lightens not my apprehensions.

Whilst the gendarme is whispering, the listener fixes his goggle eyes on me as if he would look me through. I endure his looks with the indifference of despair.

When the gendarme has finished whispering, the official pronounces the fiat. "Lock him up! Case will be heard to-morrow. Too late to-night. Present your report to the Prefect to-morrow. Meanwhile, lock him up!" He utters these sentences in short, abrupt growls.

The officer touches his cap, and we retrace our steps through the dirty offices, past the sallow-faced young man, across a stone vestibule, and into a long room, where, at a long deal table, lounge and sit about a dozen gendarmes on benches. The remains of a meal of sour-krout, curded milk, black bread, and quass are on the table, and now everyone is smoking, so that the atmosphere is suffocating.

One of my bodyguard gives an order, on which the man addressed leaves the room, and we remain waiting. Presently wheels rumble in the street, I see a square, van-shaped vehicle, painted black and yellow, pass the window.

"Now, Waldemar Nicolaivitch, if you will have the goodness," says the polite officer, with a wave of his hand towards the door.

I stalk out grimly, accompanied by my escort, and we temporarily entomb ourselves in the dark box on wheels which is open to receive us. Ten minutes' swaying, rattling, jolting over a pavement that is not macadamised, and we stop so precipitately that we are lurched forward in a heap at the bottom of the van. The polite gendarme begs my pardon, the rough one swears, and we all pick ourselves up. Then the door is flung wide, and we descend before the gates of the prison.

I look up drearily at the gloomy walls and barred windows, then around on the bare, uneven court with its offices and outhouses, and pacing sentinels, and I shudder.

A clock strikes with slow, metallic sound, eight strokes, smiting on my heart like a death dirge, and the iron-studded door receives me into its dread shadow.

CHAPTER X.

"MY LIFE IS THINE!"

I HEAR once more the harsh grating of a prison key behind me, cutting me off from liberty—shutting on me the door of hope! For some moments the misery of it overwhelms me; it wrings my heart-strings, and I am fain to groan aloud as I lean against the wall. All is dark before my eyes, whilst my anguished soul cries, "Lost! Lost! God-forsaken!"

Suddenly I feel a rough hand grasp my shoulder. I am swung forward, and find myself the centre of a score of faces, all peering and grinning into mine. I am taken so completely by surprise that for a few moments I stare stupidly from one to the other. I had thought myself alone, and behold I am surrounded by a herd of mocking devils! On every visage, young and old, the father of lies has set his vile stamp.

I realise that I am in a general cell; that these are my fellow-prisoners, and the wrathful blood leaps to my head. I shake myself free, and turn fiercely to see who has dared to molest me. In my present desperate mood I am not to be trifled with. For a word or a look I am ready to stretch a man at my feet.

My looks fall on a short, broad, powerfully built man, in the black sheepskin cap of a Cossack, under which a pair of bold, black eyes glitter and dance like wild-fire. His enormous mouth is stretched until its corners almost meet his big, prominent ears. He stands before me now, with his broad, brown hands in his sides, his body thrown back, and both attitude and mien bespeaking insolent defiance.

"Confound your impudence! What mean you?" I roar.

"I merely wish to look at you, brother," he replies, with cool deliberation. "I am interested, we are all interested in our brother in affliction."

"You insolent, presuming hound!" I gnash on him in fury. The laugh that goes round makes it

blaze up like oil on flames. I make a rush so violently and unexpectedly on the Cossack that he staggers back, and but for those behind him would have fallen. "By God, you shall also feel me!" I gasp.

A hubbub of voices is raised: "Go on! At him! Show your mettle, little father! Embrace, brothers! At him! At him!"

The Cossack has regained his balance. His huge nostrils swell out, his breath rushes through them with a snorting noise like to a horse. He bends his head forward as does a bison preparing for attack. In another moment he has darted on me, and his preternaturally long arms encircle my middle like bars of iron.

"Squeeze him! hug him! Well done, Yérack!" shriek the voices, accompanied with such noises as are used to encourage fighting dogs. I draw in my breath, and lifting the Cossack off his feet, fling him from side to side to try and shake him off, but in vain. He clings to me like a bulldog. I cannot fight a man whilst he hangs to me like this, so we struggle together silently, neither gaining an advantage for full five minutes; until a sudden movement on my part brings us both to the ground, I on top of my adversary. And now he looses his hold, and instantly I catch the gleam of steel!

My hand closes on his wrist like a vice. I wrench the weapon from his grasp and fling it from me.

"Coward!" I hiss, and deal him a blow on the head that makes it resound, like the cracking of a cocoa-nut against the floor.

His limbs relax. A deep groan escapes his breast, and I am free to rise. I do so, and stand gasping for breath and looking down on my prostrate foe. His jaw drops, and his black eyes roll up, exhibiting the whites, giving him the ghastly semblance of death. And now that my passion has spent itself, I shudder with disgust at my own folly and degradation.

What signified the fellow's familiarity? Could I not have met it with a joke?

"I fear you have finished him," observed someone.

"Serve him right!" growls another. "He is a coward and a traitor!"

"Yes, yes, serve him right!" join in the rest. "You have acted like a true man! You are of the right sort, by all the saints!"

Their compliments only increase my disgust. What care I for the opinion of such as these? I make no reply, but stalk over to the furthest corner of the cell and fling myself down on one of the inclined boards that are ranged round the walls, and which, with a filthy rug, constitute the sleeping accommodation for the prisoners.

No one follows me, or again addresses me. At least I have earned for myself immunity from further disturbance.

I watch them drag the insensible Cossack to another board, and lave his brow with water from a pitcher. Almost immediately he revives and sits up, seeking me with his roving eyes. When they have found me, he rises and staggers towards me.

"I am a hound and thou art a brave man!" he says hoarsely. "Forgive me; it was the devil prompted me to use the knife. He had possession of me and I knew not what I did!"

He waits not for my reply, but suddenly leaves my side, picks up the knife from the floor where I had hurled it, and returns it to me.

"Take it," he urges, "it is thine! I smuggled it in concealed in the folds of my sash. Slay me with it if thou wilt. My life is thine!"

As he speaks thus, his voice shakes with emotion and his dark face works strangely. I am touched with the man's contrition in spite of myself.

"Keep thy dagger," I say, "it may be useful to thee, and give me rather thy hand."

I extend to him my right, and he encloses it in a fervent clasp.

"Remember my words: my life is thine!" he reiterates. "Thou hast bought Yérack, body and soul."

And without another word, without giving me the chance of expressing the regret that is on my lips, that I should have taken his harmless, if rude sport so badly, he goes back to his board and stretches himself on it. His fellow-prisoners crowd round him with questions and remarks, but he regards them not, and turning to the wall, remains perfectly still.

In a few minutes they have forgotten us both. Half a dozen of them have settled on the floor in a circle, and are soon absorbed in some mysterious game with small blocks moulded out of black bread. Another group is disposed round an impish-looking dwarf, who sits hugging his knees like an ill-favoured ape, as he relates some tale of stirring adventure. A beggar clad in loathsome rags lies on his board and croons a song in cracked, discordant strains. A tall, lean Jew sits apart, mumbling to himself, and swaying his body to and fro. Ere long the loud, long-drawn snores of the Cossack mingle with the general din.

Thus the weary hours flow sluggishly merging into each other, until a break comes in the shape of a couple of warders bearing an enormous pail of cabbage soup, which they dole out to us in tin vessels, and a basketful of black bread, in rations.

I had wondered where I should get my next meal. Little thought I that it would be supplied to me free of charge by the Russian Government.

After supper the warders light two oil lamps that hang high up against the wall. They illuminate with a murky yellow light the motley scene. For a time the games are renewed; coarse jests are bandied, followed by loud guffaws; songs with rollicking choruses are sung to the beating of feet; then gradually the boards are filled. A few linger wrangling over a game, until the disputed point is decided by a majority, and they too seek repose.

Vainly I toss from side to side. I cannot sleep. My head is burning, my mind distraught. I think incessantly of the morrow, when I shall be placed

before a tribunal to answer for myself. What shall I plead? That my papers are lost? I should then be required to answer questions to enable the authorities to get them renewed. If I give a false name, I shall simply be detained in prison until it is proven whether I have lied. Look at it as I may, I see not a glimmer of hope. Then recur to me the words of Andrei Piotrovitch, telling me that my escape was known in Petersburg, and that a price was set on my head. Has he suspected me to be the escaped criminal, and set the authorities on me? In such case the fact of my having no papers to show will strengthen suspicion and lead them direct to the right channel for the information, and all will be brought to light.

My flesh creeps as I conjure up another scene on the scaffold, with myself as the central figure. Again I seem to feel the touch of the hideous coil on my neck, but the sustaining courage of the martyr lacks me in the hour of my utmost need, whilst I am conscious only of the degradation of my position. And Maruscha? Will she be there to witness once more the revolting spectacle? God in His mercy forbid! This I know, that she will follow me whither I go. My Maruscha will force an entrance through the grim portal by which her lover has gone. My gloomy musings are interrupted by the appearance of the Cossack, gliding towards me in the dim, yellow light. He squats himself noiselessly on the floor at my head, and gazes at me silently for some minutes. I am the first to speak.

"I am sorry I hurt you," I whisper. "Forgive me, Yérack! I might have taken your harmless jesting in better part."

"Name it not," he whispers back. "It would have served me right hadst thou dashed out my brains!"

There is a long pause, during which his restless black eyes continually seek my face. At length he leans forward so as to bring his lips close to my ear.

"Wilt thou tell me," he murmurs, falling into the

familiar second person which seems natural to him, "why thou art here? I would help thee if I can."

I hesitate. Shall I tell this man my strange, eventful story? Though I know, or think I know that it lies not in the power of any man to help me in my dire strait, yet it will be an unspeakable relief to me to unburden my mind to a sympathetic listener. And there is that in this man's manner which inspires me with the conviction of his good faith. Yes, though I have only known him a few hours, and in that time have humiliated and punished him most severely, I feel that I can trust him, even with the life he was so near filching from me erewhile.

"Thanks, brother," I reply at length. "I value thy good intention, but thou canst not aid me. I am in grievous case."

"Be not so sure. Yérack has done strange things in his time when he has said, 'I will!' Tell me thy case and let me judge."

"I am fast in a cleft, Yérack, and cannot stir. When they take me from it, assuredly it will be to hang me."

"They shall not hang thee!" The Cossack accompanies the sentence with a sharp, decisive nod.

I shake my head drearily. "When I have told thee who I am, then thou wilt see. Hast thou heard of Vladimir Alexandrovitch Lubanoff?" I whisper.

He starts and stares at me. "All Russia has heard of him," he replies.

"I am he."

As I utter the words the Cossack gazes at me as if I were a ghost. For a moment he seems to be smitten dumb with amazement. His under lip drops. Presently a flush of colour rushes to his swarthy cheeks and a strange light to his eyes. He raises his cap and bows his head before me as if I were a king.

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" he murmurs. "I believed not the rumour of thy marvellous escape. There is truly nothing too strange to happen in this strangest of worlds. Tell me about it, I pray thee."

Then in low tones I relate to him my history.

When I have come to an end, he clasps his brow with his broad fingers, and loses himself for full ten minutes in profound thought. Sometimes he draws a heavy breath, as one does when encountering some obstacle that must be overcome. At last he looks up.

"I have hope," he says. "Be of good cheer, my noble brother. Listen," he bends low to my ear. "One of the warders about the prison is a friend of mine. He is a Cossack, though he has donned the Government uniform, and we come from the same district. My term of imprisonment expires to-morrow, and if money and old acquaintanceship fail to win him over, I am not the son of my mother. I know my Cossack! I will arouse in him the slumbering lust for the wild, free life of the Steppes. I will make the sight of a uniform hateful to him, and discipline an unendurable yoke. Then I will tell him of thee! The Cossack loves generosity and worships bravery; moreover, he is ever ready for adventure. Nor is gold without its charms for him, and I have the wherewith to bribe him. Only wait patiently until we have laid our heads together and planned. And when the time is ripe, we will act!"

In spite of my better judgment, his confidence affects me with hope. After the impossible things that have already happened to me, a very straw of hope is enough for me to cling to with something of trust. Yet I say—

"Yérack, thou wilt but endanger thyself and thy friend to no purpose. What canst thou do? Thou canst not save me from the midst of these men! How were it possible even to make the attempt, surrounded as I am? Take my advice, good friend, and leave me to my fate."

"Never! If thou must perish, I perish with thee. My life belongs to thee. Bear in mind always, after I leave thee to-morrow, that Yérack the Cossack, who is called by his comrades 'The Fox' because of the cunning of his devices, is free and is working in

thy behalf! Remember it, and let it cheer thee when things look blackest!"

Again he wrinkles his brow and seems to think deeply with his eyes on the ground, and again he bends towards me to pour into my ear the result of his cogitations.

"In a few hours, probably, thou wilt be led before the Prefect for private examination. Encourage the suspicion that thou art an important political offender, then they will most likely put thee in a private cell—or, better still, confess at once who thou art, and thou wilt make sure of solitary confinement. Under no circumstances canst thou gain aught but time by withholding thy name; it must be discovered sooner or later."

"Not necessarily so," I hesitate. "If I maintain silence, and they fail to establish my identity, they can scarcely hang me. They will condemn me to perpetual imprisonment, and whilst there is life, there is hope."

The Cossack places his hand on my arm.

"The chances are that their investigations would lead to the discovery of the truth," Yérack insists. "But be that as it may, let me entreat thee to be advised by me. Take the bold step. Get thyself put into a private cell, and trust to us. Already I see my way to a plan. Only let me once be out of here, and get the ear of Kalatch, and together we will devise and act swiftly. My God, if it is in the power of man, Yérack will set thee free!"

"Be it so," I respond resolutely. "I will follow thy counsel."

At this juncture the gaunt figure of the Jew rises in the opposite corner, and his mumblings reach us. Yérack gives my arm a squeeze. "Courage! Hope!" he murmurs, ere he glides back to his board.

CHAPTER XI.

"I AM THAT MAN."

YÉRACK is gone. He was removed from the cell an hour ago, throwing towards me a significant glance as he passed out. And now again the door of the cell is opened—this time for me, and I am led along several corridors, down a short flight of stone steps, across a large vestibule surrounded by several doors, through one of which we pass into an ante-room, and thence into an inner room. I find myself standing at the end of a long table. Opposite me, in an arm-chair, sits a little, grey man in the undress uniform of a general. At a glance I ascertain that the Governor occupies another arm-chair somewhat apart, and that Andrei Piotrovitch and the two gendarmes who took me in custody are also present. Besides these there are several officials seated at the table.

The little, grey man, who is of course the Prefect, eyes me with severe fixity out of a bush of fuzzy grey hair, in a manner that is intended to strike me with awe. Nevertheless I calmly return the gaze. What to me are the awful looks of this curious little grey gadfly in my present stress of trouble? He moves uneasily, and rubs the side of his Roman nose with his forefinger. And he takes the bull by the horns at once, though unwittingly.

"In the first place, please to inform me whether the name on this envelope," here he lifts Maruscha's letter from the top of some papers that lie before him, "Waldemar Nicolaivitch Alikanoff, is your real name or an assumed one?"

"It is an assumed one," I reply promptly.

There is a stir amongst the officials. They all change their attitudes. Some lean forward, some turn in their chairs, and all with but one object, that of getting a better view of me. Though I am looking straight at the Prefect, I feel that every eye in the room regards me intently.

I observe that the Prefect is taken by surprise. My answer was the last he had expected. He lifts his double eyeglass and takes a more thorough survey of me.

"Humph!" he ejaculates. "Ah—indeed! Perhaps, as you seem disposed to be candid," he continues to snarl in his nasal treble, "you will also inform me by what name I may with confidence have the honour of addressing you?"

"Certainly. My name is Vladimir Alexandrovitch Lubanoff!"

If a smoking bombshell had fallen into their midst it could not have created a greater sensation than does my avowal. An amazed exclamation rises to every lip, followed by a stir as of a sudden breeze amongst trees. Andrei Piotrovitch is the first to break the silence that succeeds.

"Ha!" he exclaims. "Hinted I not so, my uncle? I recognised him, and mine is the reward! You must confess, Vladimir Alexandrovitch, that I recognised you?"

For reply I cast on him a look of scorn.

"Hold thy prating tongue, Andrei," I hear the Governor whisper, and he flushes deeply, "or thou wilt compel me to expose thy lies!"

Meanwhile the Prefect has recovered himself.

"You admit that you are the Vladimir Alexandrovitch Lubanoff who by some marvellous mischance escaped the fate you so richly merited?" he questions.

"I am that man!" I answer firmly, "who suffered —ay, suffered to the full the death he was condemned to die! I was hung. I endured the shame of it, the pain of it, even to the final death-throe! I satisfied justice that demanded my life; for I was dead. A Higher Power than the mighty Czar himself restored to me my life! This life I now hold I declare to be mine, by the gift of God! I had a right to do my utmost to preserve it, and he who would rob me of it commits a theft on the living God!"

My voice rings through the silent room. It carries the expression of my deepest conviction. And gazing round on my audience, I perceive that my words have made an impression. There are signs of irrepressible emotion on some of the bearded faces. The Prefect coughs behind his hand and reasserts himself.

"The State of which you are the enemy, Vladimir Alexandrovitch, must decide that question," he says. "Meanwhile we must consign you to prison until we have communicated with the authorities in Petersburg, and received their orders. Your case is out of our jurisdiction. Your examination will take place where your heinous offence was committed, and the authorities there must pronounce your sentence. Officers, withdraw your prisoner!"

The gendarmes are leading me away when the Governor steps forward, and taking one of them aside, says something to him in a low, impressive voice. The man salutes, and rejoining us, we pass out. A din of many tongues arises as we leave the room. Every one seems to be speaking at once. One remark I hear distinctly:

"They will surely not hang him again?"

The answer reaches me not, for we are already out of earshot. And now my heart beats higher. We are not retracing our steps. My guard conducts me to the right, and we enter another part of the prison. This is evidently a much older structure: the roof of the corridor is groined, and looks more in keeping with an ancient monastery than a prison. The flags under our feet are worn hollow. The low doors of the cells are of massive oak, and blackened with age. Here a warder joins us and we tramp on, the air becoming ever more oppressive with damp, the walls showing patches of vivid green mould and grey mildew as we advance.

At the extreme end of the corridor we pause at last. One of the heavy oaken doors is opened. I enter a cell which has the air of a charnel house. The door shuts behind me with a groan, the key is turned in the ponderous lock, and I am alone.

CHAPTER XII.

YÉRACK PLANS.

I LOOK around me and shiver. This cell conveys the impression of a burial vault. The solid masonry of the walls is oozing with damp, which envelops me, enters my lungs, and literally permeates my being, drowning my spirits, lowering my vitality, and extinguishing hope in my breast. The low pallet looks to me like a trestle standing ready to receive a corpse: the old, worm-eaten stool, such a one as might be used to support the elbows of some toothless priest as he mumbles his requiems over the dead. In its wanderings my gloomy gaze falls on some writing that is scratched on the wall near the door. It must have been done recently, for the scratching shows white on the dark stone. I go up to it with a vague curiosity, and read:

"ABANDON HOPE, ALL YE THAT ENTER HERE!"

"The immortal Dante inscribed those words over his Hell-gates," I think. "Are they not quite as appropriate here? And thou, poor, despairing heart!" I continue to muse, "out of whose bitter anguish those words were recalled, have thy beatings ceased? God grant it may be so, my brother in sorrow, and that thou art not still dying a thousand deaths in the poisoned mines of Siberia!"

I sink down on the edge of the bed, and the woeful words keep beating on my brain, over and over again, with distracting repetition, until my lips are compelled to form them: "*Abandon hope, all ye that enter here!*"

Into this at length falls the lazy lapping of water, of which for some time I am only half conscious. Associating it with the phrase, I think of the black waters over which Charon eternally ferries his shivering crew. There, too, is the splash of his oars and the hoarse cries of the damned. And what is that? A Russian song sung by Russian boatmen! Whence come those shadows that glide over my floor? I

look up quickly to the grated window, and the desire seizes me to see what is beyond.

In a moment I have pulled forward the old stool and mounted it, and am peeping out between the rusty bars.

And behold, a shining expanse of moving water, swelling to green banks. A row of rafts gliding past, laden with timber. A barge with bales of flax piled high on the deck, on which are boatmen, propelling it with long poles. How bright and glad and free it looks, and all so near! The swallows skim the surface, uttering their joyous scream, and dipping their pointed wings in the wave. Sometimes they swoop by so close to me that I could almost touch them.

Long I gaze on this fair and peaceful scene, losing myself in its contemplation until *almost* I forget that I am a captive; when of a sudden I am recalled to the cruel fact by the grating of a key. I am on the floor as the door opens to admit a warder with my dinner. Anxiously I scan his features, wondering if this may be he whom Yérack hoped to gain.

No, I at once conclude. There is certainly nothing of the Cossack type in this man's red freckled face; moreover, after a casual glance in my direction, he places the food on the table and quits the cell without word or sign.

Why should this dishearten me? I know that there has not been time for Yérack to have even communicated with his friend, and yet in spite of the assurance of my reason, I feel an increased sense of depression as I sit slowly consuming the coarse fare. My eyes travel once more to the writing on the wall.

How creep the weary hours, dropping so slowly into Eternity! Now I doze with my heavy head on the table. Now I pace the narrow limits of my cell; and again I take my stand to gaze out on the flowing river. Gradually the shadows gather and sweep in waves of gloom over the water. The boats cease to ply; the swallows discontinue their shrill screams, and all is still.

Oh, what a world of woe can be contained in the heart of a single man! How much can it endure without breaking! I surely know how much, and yet I live! I, of all flesh, have surely experienced the full extent of what is possible in human misery!

A warder brings me my allowance of bread and a jug of water. He informs me that I can have tea if I choose to pay for it, and shrugs his shoulders when I tell him that I have no money. On lighting my lamp he leaves me.

After a while I stretch myself on the bed, where I lie staring at the light, listening to the lapping and gurgling of the water, until it becomes part of an uneasy dream from which I rouse to gloomy musings. One besetting thought racks me: They will arrest Maruscha! With the evidence of Isajeff, the furrier, who will testify to having seen me leave her lodging, they will discover all—how she harboured me and aided my flight. Maruscha, my flower, will wither in a foul den like this! Or driven with the vilest scum of the earth along the interminable highway to Siberia, she will perish miserably by the road, or pine amidst untold hardships until death comes to her release!

The agony of such thoughts, coupled with the knowledge of my inability to do aught to prevent their realisation, no language can describe. At times I groan aloud, I wring my hands, whilst the sweat of anguish pours from my body. And thus the night wears away—the ghastly, fevered night, whose hours seem to lengthen out more and more as they crawl towards the pale dawn. Who has not felt in the stillness and gloom of night, how even a pigmy fear will grow and expand until it becomes a terror? But mine are actual terrors, which overwhelm and crush beneath their weight my quivering soul!

Anon I think of Yérack, and strain my ear to listen for a sound in the corridor, which comes not. My eyes remain glued on the closed trap in the door for a face that never appears. "Has Yérack failed?

More likely he has not made the effort, and repenting him of his generous impulse, has left me to my fate!" I inwardly groan. "God only knows how it is, but this I know, that I am here, and nothing has been done, and now the morning has come."

To-day is little more than a wretched repetition of yesterday, only I feel it less. I have become apathetic. I have lost the mental energy to think strongly. For hours I sit on one spot and move not, or I stand at the window gazing vacantly at the river and the passing craft. The beauty of the scene no longer touches me, I am only half conscious of what I see, for the dull, unspeculative despair that broods over my heart has deadened sensation. At intervals a warder brings me food, and then for a brief moment I rouse and examine his indifferent face, to sink back into my former apathy.

About mid day the sky darkens and it begins to rain. It is a straight, steady land-rain without wind, and the monotonous patter of the drops on the water comes to me, mingled with the creaking of the rafts and the husky calls of the boatmen.

After my mid day meal they take me to walk for a quarter of an hour in a court that is partly covered in, and again I shake off my apathy to observe the faces of the two gendarmes who pace at each side of me. They are stolidity personified. My eyes dart now at an official, now at a passing warder, with a vague hope that the Cossack may throw himself in my way and give me a significant glance or sign. In vain. And we are treading again the damp corridor and the gendarmes leave me in my cell.

After this a blank—whether spent in vacant senseless waking or sleeping, I know not; until once more the yellow, murky lamplight is dimly illumining my cell instead of the dull, grey daylight.

The clock in the chapel tower of the prison tolls the hour of midnight. I count the strokes mechanically, sitting on the stool with my head against the

humid wall. The final stroke is still quivering in the air when I hear a faint click!

Am I dreaming, or is there really a pair of gleaming eyes looking at me through the trap in the door? Is that in very truth a hand holding something towards me? I stagger to my feet, staring with all my might.

The hand beckons impatiently.

In two strides I am at the opening! I grasp cold, rough iron! It is a file!

A face is advanced so that I can see a long drooping moustache, as black as jet, and a pair of red lips which pronounce one word, "Work!" And the trap is closed.

I clutch it, I hug it—the little instrument that is to give me liberty! The reaction from the deepest depths of despair to sudden, full-fledged hope, for a moment overpowers me. I sink on the edge of the bed and find relief in a succession of gasping sobs. Then I get the mastery of my emotion, and rise with compressed lips, burning to commence my task. First I deliberately put out the light to obviate the possibility of my being observed either from without or within; after which I mount the stool and work! By all the Saints, I work! Steadily, persistently; hour after hour, blowing away the filings as they fall. Even when the dawn begins to glimmer I dare to continue it, until every bar is sawn through top and bottom, leaving only a thin, unfiled surface to the inside, so that a single thrust will cause the entire grating to give way.

I am examining my handiwork with comparative composure, for I have grown confident during my undisturbed labours, when the unexpected click of the opening trap makes my heart stand still with sudden dismay, whilst the sweat turns icy cold on my brow. I have, however, the presence of mind to let the file slip up my sleeve ere I turn my eyes to the door—to breathe again. I dimly descry the points of the Cossack's black moustache thrust through the aper-

ture. I noiselessly speed towards him, and he signs to me to incline my ear.

"How much have you done?" he whispers.

"Finished," I whisper in reply.

"Good. Give me the file."

I hand it to him and he thrusts it into the breast of his uniform. Again he bends down to me and murmurs the one word: "To-night!"

Then the trap is shut.

I go over to the bed, and fling myself on it with a sigh of supreme satisfaction. "It is done—my task is finished. With a single thrust of my hand I can make for myself an outlet from this foul den to liberty. A few hours and I shall be free!"

Thus I lie exulting, and rest my exhausted frame, too excited to sleep, though my limbs ache with my prolonged labours. When the daylight is fairly established a warder enters to put out the lamp.

I feign sleep.

Presently I feel his hand on my shoulder. He shakes me vigorously.

"What is this?" he says. "You have extinguished the light."

"Eh—what?" I sit up, rubbing my eyes.

"Why have you put out the lamp?" he questions. "It is a breach of the prison rules which——"

"The lamp?" I interrupt. "What about it? Has it gone out?" I blink up at it stupidly. "It is out, sure enough," I continue; "and no wonder in this infernal damp hole."

Here I rise and stretch myself as if I concluded the subject to be exhausted; half turning from the man, who I am conscious is still regarding me searchingly.

"Humph! A strange thing," he mutters. "None of the other lamps in this corridor went out with the damp, and they are all alike."

"Confound it!" I exclaim, bringing down my arms, which I am writhing lazily above my head, with a sudden jerk, and shooting a fierce glance at the man.

"What have I to do with the lamp? Think you that I gain aught by being in the dark in this accursed den? See you to it, sirrah, that it happen not again! Take heed that the wick is properly trimmed in the future. I object to the darkness, and I have a right to a light. The prison regulations require that a light be kept burning all night in every cell."

The warder seems somewhat cowed. He grumbles same inaudible response, takes the lamp from its sconce, examines it, and leaves the cell with it, still mumbling.

I laugh. That was well done, Vladimir! I congratulate myself. How madly the blood courses in my veins to-day that yesterday flowed so sluggishly. I am intoxicated with excitement; exuberant with hope. I must be moving. My limbs are as if charged with quicksilver; they impel me to constant movement. But not once do I approach the window, though my eyes continually seek it. I can distinctly see against the light the nicks made by the file in the bars. Even a casual examination from a distance might reveal them to anyone; consequently, I suffer unspeakable anxiety each time I am visited by a warder. I covertly watch his face from where I sit with my back to the light, feeling the sweat burst from all my pores. When I am alone again the sense of relief is so great that, for some minutes, I have enough to do to steady my reeling brain and bring my senses back to the realisation of my situation. And each time I am called on to undergo this ordeal my sufferings intensify, until my nerves are completely unstrung and the strength gone from me.

It is the very longest day of my life! And when at last the shades begin to gather and enshroud me, I cast myself down on my bed utterly spent with the burden of it, and my worn-out system finds relief in sleep. When I awake the lamp is burning once more, and my supper stands on the table. I start to my feet and my hand goes to my watch-pocket to drop mid-

way at the recollection that Maruscha's watch is no longer there. They took it from me when they searched me. I must listen for the striking of the clock.

Meanwhile I eat up all the food that has been brought me, as I have done systematically all day, and take a long pull of water. After which I seat myself opposite the door and wait breathlessly, braced for the moment of action.

Over and over again I anticipate it in my mind. With one spring I am on the stool, one thrust and the bars yield; another spring, and my head and shoulders are through the aperture; a plunge—the water closes round me—I rise to the surface like a cork, and strike out for bare life! Farther than this I go not.

And hark! That is the stroke of the clock. I count ten strokes. Still I must wait! I set my teeth, and struggle for composure. The longing to act almost overmasters me. But why should I not fly at once? A minute from now and I might be free! Hours—the entire night might pass ere my flight was discovered! Meanwhile, I might be far on my way!

I am on my feet, when the recollection of my brave confederates arrests me. Am I turned dastard and traitor that I think only of my own safety? I know not their plan, but of this I may be certain, that my precipitate flight will spoil it, will wound their feelings, and may risk their lives. No, God forgive me the thought, and give me patience. I wait! and I sink back to my stool. Another eternity of waiting. My eyeballs seem to be starting from their sockets as I sit staring at that door. My ears ache with the strain of listening for a sound outside, whilst they hear only the "thump, thump" within my breast. And when at last a pair of eyes appear, peeping through the trap, I rush forward with an involuntary exclamation, to discover that it is the warder, the same who had questioned me about the lamp in the morning. Returning to my seat in confusion I hear him chuckle as he shuts the trap.

This incident creates in me a fresh source of uneasiness. The fellow's suspicions are evidently not at rest concerning the extinguished lamp, and he is watching me. Will he keep it up all night? In such a case I should not be safe from his observation a single hour.

It occurs to me, however, that as he is on duty now he will probably be relieved by the Cossack at midnight, whom he will charge to watch me! The notion tickles me, and I laugh.

Eleven strokes of the clock come sobbing in to me on the dank night air. I bethink me to go and lie down and draw the musty rug up to my chin, lest those prying eyes should look in on me again. However, it turns out to be an unnecessary precaution, for I see no more of them. At last! At last, it is twelve o'clock! Minute after minute passes. My suspense is swelling to agony. The blood in my veins is as if turned to fire, for he comes not! It must be a quarter past!—half past! What if he should not come at all? And how easily may some unforeseen accident have prevented him. Must I then endure another day of this cruel suspense? And not for myself alone, but for Maruscha. Ever since I saw the possibility of escape, my dominant thought has been how I should be able to apprise her of the danger in store, and enjoin her to lose no time in quitting the country. A day, an entire day, how much could be done in it! The loss of a day might lose Maruscha. And what would be liberty to me without Maruscha? . . . . A mockery, a burden, which I would scorn to hold whilst the woman I love was pining in exile for my sake. To know her safe would make death less bitter, but life without her I would refuse to accept!

Unable longer to bear the stress of doubt and dread; fearful lest I may be letting slip my one chance of saving myself and her, yet hoping every moment to see the Cossack, and reluctant to act

without him, I have risen to my feet and am standing irresolute, when without the slightest warning I am startled by the sudden grating of the key in the rusty lock, and directly the Cossack enters; changes the key to the inside, and locks us in! For the first time I see my stranger friend. A single glance at him inspires me with confidence. Small, almost dwarfish; meagre, colourless, his face and form are yet instinct with energy and nerve. There is strength in every feature and every line of the thin face with its eagle nose, its thin-lipped, decisive mouth, over which the big moustache is twisted; the keen, dark eyes and salient cheek bones. His excitement he keeps well in command; though it is visible to me in the glitter of his eyes, the compression of his lips, and the strange dints that come and go in his sallow cheeks.

He steps quickly up to me, and lays his yellow bony hand on my arm.

"Ready?" he whispers.

"Quite," I respond promptly. And I *am* ready—ready to face all the powers of darkness or the Czar, if need be, now that the moment for action has come.

"You can swim?"

"Like a fish."

"Come then. You first; I follow. Straight across where Yérack awaits us."

I am on the stool preparing to thrust out the grating.

"Towards you! Towards you! Pull the bars inside," whispers the Cossack. "It will make less noise. And by all the saints, the light!" He darts to the lamp and puts it out, and is standing below me ready to receive the grating from my hand.

Already I am drawing myself up to the stone ledge. My head is through the aperture when—merciful Father! What was that? A familiar click! The Cossack has me by the legs and is actually pulling me back! I hear him say—

"Ah, just in time, Anton Antoneivitch! Not

quite smart enough, my brave. Ha, ha!" as he drags me to the ground.

And whilst I am struggling, dazed and bewildered, to my feet he has rushed to the door, unlocked it, and by the dim light that illuminates the corridor I see him seize someone by the arm, jerk that someone into the cell, and lock the door again.

"Just in time! Just in time to help me!" I hear him repeat, with a strange, wild exultation in his voice.

Then there is a short, fierce struggle in the dark. The bed creaks under a falling body. . . A cry of "help," that is instantly smothered, followed by gasps and groans.

What means it? Who is the vanquished? Is it the Cossack who lies groaning on that bed or that other one? In vain my eager eyes try to pierce the darkness. It is as black as pitch.

The Cossack's voice reassures me at length.

"I have him!" he pants.

Another groan and a gurgling sound.

"You were going to spoil our little game—what?" says the Cossack with cutting irony; and there is an unpleasant thud as of a head being knocked against a wall.

"Where are you, my brother? Come here. Quick!"

I feel my way towards the voice, and my hand comes in contact with the arm of the Cossack.

"In my trousers pocket you will find a matchbox. Strike a light," he dictates. "I must see what I am doing here."

I comply, and see a ghastly sight.

On his back on the bed, his body convulsed, his face purple and swollen, his tongue protruding from his mouth, lies the warder who had so recently looked in on me. The Cossack's fingers are tightly twisted in the collar of the prostrate man's uniform, and the Cossack's knee is on his chest. He is to all appearances lifeless.

"He will tell no tales," observes the Cossack as he removes his fingers from the deadly grip. And

the smile with which he regards his senseless foe is truly diabolic. "Yet he might come round. Shall I make sure?" He draws a small stiletto from the bosom of his coat and suspends it in mid-air.

I stay his hand.

"Slay him not," I say. "If he be really dead, God speed his soul. If the life is still in him, leave him the chance of it. His death will not benefit us."

"Humph; less trouble to have given him his *quietus*," he mutters, hiding away his knife again. "We cannot leave him thus. We must tie his hands and gag him, or he might set the dogs on us sooner than we expect. And certainly, if he has still a squeak left in him when they find him he can tell them nothing that they would not discover at a glance."

Whilst he talks, he loses no time. He produces some strong cord from his pocket and binds the man's wrists together behind his back. After which he proceeds to gag his gaping mouth with a handkerchief. "It was cleverly done," he chuckles. "I was quick. Yes. In an instant I had him! It was the one thing to do—to secure him. Once he had got away to give the alarm, though we might still have escaped by the window, I would not have given the snuff of a candle for our chances of landing at the other side save into the arms of the gendarmes. It was even the best thing that could have happened that he should have come; for now, I reckon, they will not be likely to find out that the bird has flown before five in the morning, and by then they will find it a difficult task to get near enough to him to strew salt on his tail."

Now he turns his dancing black eyes on me. "What thought you when I pulled you back? What?"

"What thought I? It would be hard to say. I was so taken by surprise, so thunderstruck."

"You thought I had turned traitor, that was what you thought!"

He shakes with smothered laughter. Yet all the

time his quick nervous fingers are busy tying the knot at the back of his victim's head.

"There now, thou art fixed up—warranted not to go off!" he continues, apostrophising the insensible man. "Adieu, my friend, and a good recovery! And now out with the light and let us start. Yerack will think that all is lost. We must be well-nigh an hour late."

In less than five minutes I am cleaving the cold, black water, striking cut blindly for the opposite shore. In my rear comes the Cossack, gasping and spluttering. From the noise he makes I know he swims dog fashion.

The darkness is so profound that I cannot descry even the vaguest outline of the bank I am making for, though the scene from my prison windows is photographed on my brain. The grassy slope, with here and there a willow laving its branches in the water; along the top, the road running parallel with the river; beyond, a dense background of trees, with the roofs of summer-houses showing bright against the sombre green.

The river is not wide, and already I feel the bank. Groping for a hold, my hand comes in contact with a branch by which I pull myself up. The Cossack is close on my heels.

"Catch hold of this branch," I whisper, bending it down to where I hear him gasping. So hastily is it snatched from me that I had almost lost my balance. I recover myself to find a dark object rising at my feet.

"Onward!" he pants, taking the lead.

A little more scrambling and we are on the road. The Cossack hurries me along a few hundred paces. Then a form steps out from the trees and silently confronts us.

It is Yérack!

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CHAPTER XIII.

A COSSACK'S JOKE.

My companion utters one word in a language unknown to me, and Yérack retreats into the black gloom of the trees. There is a stamping of horses and the muffled rolling of well-greased wheels. My sight having grown accustomed to the darkness, I can make out a "troika" and some sort of vehicle, as they emerge on the road. We quickly climb into the latter, which proves to be a cart laden with sacks of wool. Yérack springs to the seat in front, and away we speed as only a Russian "troika" can.

Nothing says Yérack to either of us until between us and Kovna lie many versts, and the barren land is all about us. Suddenly he observes:

"Well, brothers, so far, good. And now for the transformation scene! Thou, Vladimir Alexandrovitch, as thy hands are white and thou hast something of a clerical air about thee"—here he gives vent to a sly chuckle—"art to be transfigured into a 'Pope,'* with purple, silk kaftan and flowing locks; not forgetting a beard that would grace a patriarch. It rests with thee to play thy new *rôle* well. Art thou satisfied with it?"

"Yérack, my friend, I have no words wherewith to thank thee!" I exclaim warmly.

"Bah, I merit no thanks. If I save thee, it will be life for life. I like to be level with people. And for thee, brother Kalatch, as the leopard cannot change his spots and thou art always a Cossack confessed, every inch of thee, even in that devil's livery thou has seen fit to don of late, I have procured a Cossack's dress. In any other thou wouldst surely look like a Cossack in disguise. With a bushy beard from ear to ear and a quarter of an 'archin' off thy moustache, methinks thou wilt pass."

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* Russian Priest.

"I would to God thou wouldst make haste and let me rid myself of these soaking duds!" replies Kalatch, with irritation, whilst his teeth knock together like castanets. "I am certainly sickening of ague! Hast thou no brandy, brother?"

"Yes, I have brandy. Thou art more likely to catch a weasel asleep than Yérack on the road without his flask." And Yérack takes a large flask from one of his capacious pockets and thrusts it into Kalatch's hand.

"Finish it not, leave a drop for a brother," he cries, after the flask has remained a full minute glued to the ex-warder's lips.

"Ah-h!" sighs Kalatch. "I feel better!"

"Pass it on," says Yérack. And I too feel not a little comforted when a moderate draught of the stimulating fluid has reached my interior. After Yérack has followed our example, he gropes amongst the sacks and brings up two bundles which he presents to us respectively.

It is one of the most difficult things imaginable to make a complete change of toilette in a cart on the top of a pile of sacks, whilst three horses are tearing full gallop with you through the darkness. However, necessity has been known to make a man accomplish wonders; thus, after many curses from the Cossack and from myself not a few, owing to some extraordinary entanglements of each other's members, this seemingly impossible feat is accomplished.

What bliss it is to lie still amongst the sacks with a dry skin, after the wet clothes have been stowed away, and listen to Kalatch describing in his terse, powerful diction, his adventure with the warder! And how Yérack enjoys it!

"Good—good; well done!" he interpolates, slapping his leg.

When all is told, he says—

"But what? Surely this little business took not so long? Three-quarters of an hour—I counted the chimes—to knock a dog like that on the head?"

"Not so. The confounded jackanapes detained

me so long with his gabble in the corridor that it required all my self-control not to fall on him there and then. It was all about No. 346, whom this acute servant of the Czar suspected of some mischievous design. He would not attempt to give it a name, but something there must be; for was not the light out in the prisoner's cell when the zealous one went to extinguish it in the morning? Why should this particular lamp go out and not any one of the others? If even two had gone out, but this one! It spoke for itself. And this was not all; I must perforce listen to all the cases where lamps had been extinguished, and why? Then, lastly, to receive his injunctions about keeping an eye on this dangerous No. 346, who had, doubtless, thoughts of suicide. And when at the end of it he went, and I saw him turn the corner, he must have stolen back and seen me enter the cell. Ha! something had been discovered! He must have a finger in the pie. So, back he comes, and gets his share of the glory. Ha, ha!"

Meanwhile a dull, smoke-grey streak has been widening on the horizon, and now I can make out the details of Yérack's dress where he sits before me on the front of the cart, and also the head of Kalatch emerging from the sacks, surmounted by the tall Cossack's cap. His profile is between me and the horizon, so that his hooked nose and the bushy beard are marked out against the growing light. Though they continue to converse together, I no longer gather the substance of their conversation, for I think of Maruscha, and how soon I may get a letter despatched to her. I cannot help feeling a consuming anxiety about her, though I keep assuring myself that she is safe from interference until the inquiries subsequent to my trial in Petersburg should be instituted. It is natural to suppose that some days will elapse after the authorities there hear of my capture before outsiders like Isajeff will hear of it, and come forward with evidence.

"Yérack," I say at length, "where are we at present? It is necessary that I get to a post town as soon as possible."

"We are about ten versts from Börlitch," replies Yérack, without looking round.

"I must send a letter from Börlitch," I say.

"Bah—nonsense!" exclaims Yérack, impatiently. "This is not a time to write letters! It is bad—bad—to send writing through the post! I believe not in this letter-writing, it has lost many a man!"

"Yérack, when I tell thee that the safety of one to whom I owe my life is endangered through me and that the—the individual knows not of it, therefore without being warned cannot escape it, thou wilt recognise that I cannot argue this point with thee."

The Cossack gives a dissatisfied grunt, but says no more about it. Presently he informs me that we pass through Börlitch on our way to Vilna. "Where thou wilt take train direct to Königsberg," he adds quietly, as if it were the simplest thing in the world my passing the frontier.

"To Königsberg?" I repeat in amaze.

"Yes; that is the programme. And thou wilt arrive safe and sound in the Prussian town without a single hindrance. The officials at the frontier will doff their caps to thee and say, 'God speed thee, Holy Father!'"

"Thou art pleased to joke, Yérack," I respond mournfully. "I fail to see the fun of it myself. The crossing of the frontier is a serious business for consideration; God only knows how it is to be managed."

"Exactly; a joke—a good joke! That is it!" And his shoulders shake with laughter. He slaps the breast of his tunic. "It is all here, that joke. It is so good a joke that I am loth to part with it; yet, by-and-by, all Russia—all Europe shall enjoy this very excellent joke that now is all mine!"

"Confound it, brother; let us have it! Why philander so long about it?" growls Kalatch.

"All in good time. It will keep, my good friend." And again Yérack indulges in a solitary laugh.

A long silence ensues. Kalatch's head disappears from the range of my vision, and ere long loud snores rise at intervals near me. Yérack slackens the pace of the horses to a steady trot, and thus we proceed until we come to a log bridge thrown over a stream. He pulls up at the side of the road.

"Come, rouse thee, Kalatch!" he cries. "Get down and stand by the horses' heads."

Kalatch, still half asleep, stumbles over the edge of the cart, and mechanically does as he is told.

"Now give me the clothes, Vladimir Alexandrovitch."

I dive amongst the sacks and fish up the two wet bundles. He takes them from me, and looks anxiously up and down the road. Having satisfied himself that it is deserted, he hurries up the stream and is soon lost to sight in its tree-fringed windings.

In about ten minutes he returns without the bundles.

"What hast thou done with them?" inquires Kalatch.

"Sunk them in a pool," is the laconic reply.

I am on the road, stamping up and down to stretch my legs, about which the long silken skirt of the kaftan is flapping. My appearance must be startling, for as Yérack catches sight of me, he utters a little cry of surprise, which attracts the attention of Kalatch, and he, too, looks at me.

I break into a laugh at the open-mouthed wonder on their faces.

"Well," says Yérack, at length. "Thou art good enough to show in a caravan at the fair of Nishi-Novgorod. Thou art a big man, brother, and what with the long gown and high cap of the priest, thou lookest gigantic!"

He takes me by the arm and twists me about, viewing me from all sides, and his countenance grows ever more grave.

"The priestly garb is a mistake," he mutters, "it

adds to the height, which is already conspicuous enough. All eyes will dwell on thee. Not that it matters," he adds quickly.

"So that thou art easy and composed they may stare their fill. Thy own mother might stare at thee until she grew blind, she would never know thee to be her son!"

"That she would not!" endorses Kalatch.

Yérack looks at the speaker, and his attention becomes fixed. Presently he goes over to where he stands at the horses' heads and examines him dubiously.

"Thy stiletto, brother," he says at length.

Without a word, Kalatch takes it from the folds of his sash and tenders it to Yérack.

"Steady!" says the latter, seizing the end of Kalatch's long moustache, and—swish! goes the keen blade, close past the eagle nose and through the hair, leaving a tuft in the operator's fingers. In a trice the other side has shared the same fate, and whilst Yérack, with something of mischievous glee in his broad face, is strewing the hair to the winds, his mate is ruefully stroking his upper lip and vainly essaying to twist the stunted remains. Certainly, what with the false beard that entirely covers the lower part of his face, and the altered character of his moustache, the warder of Kovno Gaol is no longer recognisable.

Now Yérack leads the troika into the middle of the road and unyokes the advance horse, which he ties with a halter to the back of the cart.

"It looks not usual for a troika to be drawing a cart of this kind," he explains. "Thus it will appear as if the beast were being led for sale."

It takes him some time to complete his arrangements. He takes a woollen cloth from the cart and rubs the horses well down, talking to them the while in terms of praise and encouragement. They turn their noses to him as if they understand, blowing through their wide nostrils, and the foam drops in flakes to the ground. When this is done, he hooks bells to the harness.

"Now we shall do," he observes. "We are traders journeying to the Fair at Vilna, and thou art a priest who has honoured us by accepting a lift. We proceed leisurely, for we have no haste; the fair only begins to-morrow. At the same time, brother, so imposing is thy appearance, that thou lookest out of place in a cart with trading Cossacks, and therefore at Börlitch we had better part company and thou wilt proceed with the post."

"But, my good friend, this will cost money, and I am without a copec!" I cry.

"I have enough and to spare."

"Yérack, how can I take so much from thee!" I exclaim, deeply moved by the Cossack's generosity. "Thy devotion I can never repay, but the money thou art laying out on me I may some day be able to refund. Give me some address to which I may send it. Surely in time I shall work for the means to pay my just debts."

"Bah! keep thy mind easy and make not a mountain of a molehill! What are a few roubles to me? I have neither kith nor kin, and what shall I do with superfluity? Drink it, gamble with it, squander it. Let me put a trifle of it to a good use. I have taken a fancy to thee, my son. I beg thee, let a lonely man have his whim!"

Yérack's voice shakes a little as he speaks. His face is averted. What can I reply to this? Nothing. My trembling lips refuse to form even a word of thanks. Silently I wring my benefactor's hand.

Kalatch, who looks tragic, not having got over the loss of his moustache, is mounting the wool sacks, and I am about to follow his example, when Yérack stays me.

"Not so, my son," he says. "Thou must be mindful of thy dignity. Thy place now must be beside me on the seat. The morning is advancing, when we will begin to meet people by the road."

Sure enough, before we have proceeded a verst, a

post-chaise rattles past us. Its occupant, who looks like a shopkeeper, nods in the bottom of the chaise, asleep, enveloped in a large white dust-cloak. The driver stares hard at me, pulls off his cap and bows low his head.

"God be with thee, my son!" I exclaim, returning his greeting.

"Well done! Reverently done!" applauds Yérack.

A little farther, and a file of peasant-labourers emerge from a by-path which leads to a homestead, on their way to work in the fields. They all open wide their eyes, but stop at the side of the road to prostrate themselves.

"Bless you, my children!" I say again, whilst Yérack can scarcely contain his extravagant delight at my acting, until they are out of earshot. It is still very early when we reach the town, yet before we arrive at the inn where Yérack halts, we have encountered many people, but all of the lower orders. I have had to respond to many greetings, and am made thoroughly uncomfortable by the obvious sensation I create. I feel relieved to enter the dark fore-place of the inn, with its small, dirty windows, and I hear Yérack give vent to a sigh which I know is of relief.

"Holy Father," he whispers, with a low laugh, "seated on the front of that cart, beside a Cossack, methinks it looked somewhat like a masquerade."

The innkeeper comes yawning to meet us, from an inner room, putting on his blouse. He stops with one arm above his head as he sees Yérack, and his brows go up. They are evidently old friends, these two.

"Yes, it is myself, Thoma Fedoreivitch!" says Yérack, grinning from ear to ear. "It is not my ghost—not yet."

"I thought—I thought——" stammers the landlord.

"Quite right, too," interrupts Yérack. "Yet here I am again. And I want to drop a word in thy ear, little father." With this he takes the man apart

and whispers to him, during which the listener glances repeatedly in my direction, his small eyes beginning to twinkle, and his mouth widening to a grin. Sometimes he puts a question.

At length the confabulation comes to an end, and the innkeeper, after signing to us, leads the way through a passage, and opens the door of a small, dingy room at the back of the building. We enter, and he leaves us, shutting the door.

"Thoma Fedoreivitch is a safe man," observes Yérack, knowingly. "That kind of man is always safe so long as you grease his palm. Thoma and I have had our little transactions together."

"But surely thou hast not confided—thou hast not told him who I am?" I ask in alarm.

"Not likely, I am not such a fool! Only fools make confidants for the sake of hearing their tongues wag! but I had to tell him something. I knew he would suspect thee to be other than thou seemest, for he knows me too well to suppose that I would wilfully join company with a priest. So I told him that the police were after thee for horse-stealing!" Having delivered himself of this explanation, Yérack falls back into a chair and rolls about, holding his sides with laughter, in which Kalatch joins. Perhaps the fact that I remain perfectly grave adds intensity to their enjoyment of a joke I fail to see; for every glance at my face seems to set them off again on a fresh roar.

"Why—why horse-stealing?" I ask at length.

"Oh, Lord! Let me not burst!" groans Yérack. Then, after much gasping and wiping of his face, "Why, but to give thee importance in his eyes! To make thee interesting! It is in Thoma's own line—he has a taste for horseflesh!"

And again Yérack rolls in his chair and roars.

The return of the landlord, bearing a tray with breakfast, diverts the jovial Cossack's mind from the abstract to the concrete. The repast consists of beer, raw salt herring, preserved mushrooms, and white bread.

"Ah, I am as hungry as a hawk!" says Yérack, taking up a herring by the tail to hold it over his mouth and crunch it up.

I take the opportunity to ask for writing materials and, if it is to be had, a stamp, as it is still too early for the post-office to be open.

"Certainly, Holy Father," responds the landlord, with a twinkle in his beady eye. "I can furnish your Holiness with all."

Another burst of laughter from both the Cossacks, whilst the speaker crosses his hands on his breast and bows low before me ere he goes. He brings me the paper in his dirty finger and thumb. It is greased and soiled, the pen splutters and the ink is of the consistency and colour of mud, but they suffice me to write these lines:—

"On receiving this, lose not an hour in procuring thy passport and starting for Berlin. Make no halt anywhere, but travel day and night. I hope to precede thee, and will await the arrival of all trains from Königsberg. Should I be deterred, seek our brother, Conrad Rosen, Stein-Strasse, No. 79, who will advise and assist thee. If possible, send warning, *indirectly*, to Ivan and Pavel. All is known and searching inquiries will be made. I am safe and well and with friends. Thine until death.—V."

I read over what I have written. It is sufficiently explicit, and I have no fear but that Maruscha will obey my injunctions to the letter, if she can! I quake to think of the risk; for, should the faintest suspicion of being implicated in politics attach to her, she is lost. They will open her letters and this will cause her immediate arrest. However, there is no help for it. God help us; it is our only chance!

As I am folding and addressing it, Yérack comes behind me and looks over my shoulder.

"Humph," he grunts. "A woman; I thought as much!"

I turn on him, wrathfully, with an angry retort leaping to my lips, which, however, I check, remembering how much I owe to this brave fellow. I even summon up a smile.

"Yes, a woman, thou old misogynist, who yet art the son of a mother. And such a woman! Brave and true, Yérack, but for whom I should not be in the land of the living, for I owe my life to her as I owe it also to thee!"

"Well, well, if that be so. I grant thee, there are —there may be different sorts. Though, for my part, I have known but the one—the catlike sort, sleek and fawning and false; stroking you with velvet paws in which sharp claws are hidden wherewith to tear you unawares. I like not the feline tribe."

Having spoken, he protrudes his upper lip, making his bristly moustache stand out. He looks very fierce and bitter, and though I answer nothing, I think, "Assuredly thou hast had some cruel experience, my friend."

In a few moments, however, his face reassumes its habitual expression of complacency, and he says to me, "Now, my son, get thee something to eat and let us to business."

He pours beer into a glass and places food before me; standing by and watching, with overt satisfaction, whilst I make it disappear.

"Thou hast done well," he observes, when I have eaten my fill, and pushed the plate from me.

He draws a chair to the table, close to my elbow, and with slow deliberation, and an expression of supreme self-satisfaction, takes from his tunic a large, bloated-looking pocket-book, out of which he abstracts a folded paper.

"Now, Nikor Andreivitch Tcherevin," he says, mouthing his words with an unctuous intonation. "In reply to your appeal for permission of leave of absence on the plea of ill-health, I have the pleasure to hand over to you from the Archimandrite of your diocese this paper, which you will perceive entitles you to a month's sojourn abroad."

I take the paper he holds towards me, and unfold it. Sure enough, there is the ecclesiastical seal, the

wavering signature of the aged Church dignitary, and on scanning it I find that here indeed is a formal leave of absence to: "My ailing son, the Reverend and Holy Father Nikor Andreivitch Tcherevin, extending over a period of one month, to enable him, by medical advice, to drink the waters of Kissingen." I suppose I look my amazement, for Yérack, watching me, begins to grin, and execute a series of knowing winks.

Kalatch, who has come up behind my chair, spells it out slowly and exclaims—

"By all the blessed saints! I believe thou art in league with the devil, brother! Tell us about it. How hast thou procured it?"

"Yes; how? Who is Nikor Andreivitch?" I manage to stammer.

This seems too much for Yérack. He throws himself back and indulges in one of his mighty roars.

"He knows not his own name!" he chokes. "Ah, Nikor Andreivitch! my poor Nikor; it is indeed time something was done for thy health."

Ere I have time for further question, he produces a familiar-looking little greenback, the sight of which makes my heart jump; and this time, without any previous speech, he puts it into my hand.

It proves to be a passport made out in the name of this same Nikor Andreivitch, travelling to Germany. I read the description of myself as I now appear, in a sort of stupefaction. I cannot take in my good fortune all at once.

Age—Thirty.
Height—Above average.
Eyes—Brown.
Hair and Beard—Brown and curled.
Complexion—Fair and fresh-coloured.
Nose—Aquiline.

Grasping this precious talisman, and realising what it means to me, my excitement becomes so great that I can no longer sit still. I rise precipitately and fall

to pacing the floor, whilst I vainly struggle for speech. Joy and gratitude strike me dumb, and like a woman the tears rush to my eyes and flow down my cheeks.

At length I go up to Yérack, and placing my hands on each of his shoulders, I look down into his broad, jovial face.

There comes a strange stir into it, but in an instant he jumps to his feet and laughs boisterously.

"Ha, ha, ha! Come, friend Nikor, if thou wouldst catch the evening express in Vilna, thou must bestir thyself."

Meanwhile I have sufficiently mastered my emotion to say—

"Yérack, my friend—my noble friend! Thou wouldst escape my thanks. And the gratitude of my life long is all I may give thee. Generous Yérack; she, too—how she will bless thee for what thou hast done for us! Would that she were here to thank thee in her sweet, gracious way!"

"Let be, let be. Thou canst not imagine how I have enjoyed this escapade. To have tricked them so cleverly! Ah, only to have seen the face of that warder this morning when he entered the cell! Ho, ho! That skinny little prefect. How small he would look when they told him of the tragedy! How he would fume and stamp! Oh, it is splendid; splendid!"

"But, the devil take all the rest. What I want to know is how thou camest by the documents, and in so short a time, too?" interrupts Kalatch impatiently.

Yérack gives a contemptuous snort. "What a fuss thou makest about so small a matter!" he responds, overlooking the fact that he has himself crowed not a little over this "small matter." "One would think thou hadst been born and bred a thousand miles from Russia, and knew naught of the customs of the country. Roubles—roubles—roubles! What is there in Russia that cannot be bought with Russian roubles? I rustle a handful of dirty rouble notes, and without a word of persuasion a Government

clerk writes out the passport to my dictation. A Holy Father prepares the other document from one he has in his possession, and hands it to me with a —'Bless thee, my son!' And never a remonstrance save when I pressed a little token of my gratitude into his palm. They are so obliging and so single-minded, those Holy Fathers! It is beautiful to see how they one and all abhor filthy lucre!"

"Thou must have spent a fortune over me, Yérack," I say remorsefully. The weight of so many obligations oppresses me.

"And if thou hadst knocked the life out of me that time, as I deserved, what use would my money have been to me, then? Moreover, I assure thee, that I speak truth when I say I have more than I need. Trust Yérack for looking after himself, too. He knows how far he can go. And now here is for thy journey, and I have done with thee."

He takes a thick packet of notes from his pocket-book, and without counting them divides them into two equal parts—or as near equal as could be gauged—and gives me one. Though I am obliged to be still farther his debtor to the amount of my journey, I shun to take advantage of such reckless liberality. I begin to count the notes, resolved to accept what I stand in absolute need of and no more. They seem to be all twenty-five rouble notes. I separate four from the bulk.

"These will more than suffice," I say, holding the remainder towards him. "It is well for thee, my friend, that thy head is firmly fastened on thy shoulders, or thou wouldst certainly give it away."

I try to smile at him as I speak, but my trembling lips render the attempt a failure.

His reply is to snatch all the notes from me with comical fierceness, roll them up, and stuff them into the inside pocket of my kaftan.

"Enough of this fooling!" he exclaims. "Not another word will I hear on so paltry a subject. What is more to the purpose, let us settle what is to

be done next. It will be best that we part here. Thou wilt go on foot into the town—straight up this street, taking the first turn to the right, and in the market is both the post-office and the posting station. Arrived at Vilna, drive direct to the railway station. With moderate driving thou wilt be there in time to catch the evening express. And let me remind thee who thou art. Forget not thy priestly dignity. Keep also a bold front, for thou art secure. The passport will assuredly be enough, but hesitate not to show the leave of absence. The two together will at once put to flight the least shadow of doubt. There is just the fact of thy having no luggage that might arouse suspicion. Here, too, thou canst easily hoodwink them. Thou wilt describe it—go to the luggage van for the purpose of identifying it,—excite thyself, get into a towering rage because it is not there; threaten to lodge a complaint against the railway servants for their neglect in not putting it in the train when it is addressed and properly labelled; make a great stir, and give special orders as to the forwarding of it without loss of time. Ah, how I wish I had the farce to act! How I would rage and fume and threaten!"

"I promise thee to use my utmost ability, brother," I respond. "Nor am I a novice. I have had some acting to do in my time."

"Another thing I would mention," resumes the Cossack. "I fain would hear of thy safe arrival. One line will be enough—'Arrived safe!' 'All well,' what thou wilt. Only address it not to me, I am too well known for a scamp; moreover, I am under surveillance of the police," he chuckles, shutting up his left eye. "Let me see," he continues with sudden gravity. "From Vilna we proceed to Minsk, on our way to the East. Arrived at the Province of the Don, where I am a native, we will pause until I have disposed of certain properties. Our final destination will be the Kirghez Steppes. There we will pitch our tent. They will scarcely follow us there.

Send, therefore, thy communication to Minsk. I can always induce some sleek Government clerk to call for it at the post-office and fetch it to me."

Hereupon he takes up the pen, and with great solemnity, forming each letter with his lips the while, he writes on one of the sheets of paper. It is a slow and laborious task, but at last is is accomplished. I receive the paper, and read: "dmitri petrovitch herzen Minsk post restante."

Yérack sticks out his lips and watches me whilst I read it.

"Thou canst make it out? Yes?" he inquires.

"With perfect ease. It is very distinct."

"Ah; well I flatter myself that my writing is very distinct. I may not write a fluent hand, not being a dog of a clerk, nevertheless it can be read running." He blows out his nostrils and assumes an air of importance, but only for a minute.

Already he is grasping me by the shoulders with a steadfast gaze on my face, and once more that strange stir is visible in his features.

"Ah!" he sighs. "But for the woman thou wouldst perhaps have thrown in thy lot with me and gone with us to the Steppes. What times we might have had!"

I answer nothing, for I would not hurt the brave fellow's feelings. I feel that he understands me not. Under no circumstances could I have been content to spend my life amongst a barbarous horde whose sole pleasures consist in marauding, drinking, and hunting. Accustomed to civilised life, with a keen interest in its advancement; a student to boot, having studied and qualified for the profession of my choice, my ardent desire is to resume my place amongst civilised men and help on their advancement.

"Well, well, it cannot be," he resumes. "So embrace me, my son, and go thy way."

We kiss each other heartily on both cheeks and he releases me. The same ceremony is gone through

with Kalatch. I thank him for the service he has rendered me, to which he will not listen.

"I was glad of a reason for pitching up the accursed job," he says. "I could not have stood it much longer."

At the door of the room we encounter, or rather stumble against the landlord. My impression is that we have disturbed him with his ear to the key-hole. He is, however, not the least discomfited.

"What, go you already?" he inquires.

"Nikor Andreivitch goes now. We also start directly," replies Yérack. "Bring me the bill."

"First let me wish the Holy Father a successful journey, and thank him for thus having honoured my humble roof!" says the landlord with a sly leer and an obsequious bow.

"I thank thee for thy good wishes, and bless thee, my son!" I reply, falling in with his good humour.

The Cossacks accompany me to the outer door. I shake hands with both in silence, fervently pressing the hand of Yérack, and hurry away into the town.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CURSE OF GREATNESS.

On the balcony of the posting station I am met by the station-master, who greets me respectfully, and receives my orders. I then enter the general waiting-room. At this early hour it is deserted. Almost immediately, an unwashed, sleepy-looking waiter comes in and asks me if I require anything. I answer in the negative. He rubs down the beer-stained table with a dirty towel and retires, leaving me, as I prefer to be, alone. I beguile the time examining the highly coloured prints that adorn the walls.

There is St. Peter nailed to the cross with his head downwards, who, judging from his vacant smile, seems to like it. The bloom of rude health is on

his cheeks and lips. The rosy tinge of health flushes his sturdy limbs. He will die very hard indeed, but he sees that radiant troupe of blue-eyed angels advancing towards him in a glorious cloud of orange chrome, and he can afford to smile.

For the first time I am made aware by the ingenious Russian artist, in a striking representation of the "Judgment of Solomon," that the wisest of mankind was a Russian "Pope," and the actors on this memorable occasion none other than Russian grandees. That Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—strolling about amongst the yellow and crimson flames, as if taking a constitutional—were Russian moujiks; and that Abraham wore a blue, swallow-tailed coat on the occasion of his intended sacrifice of his son Izaak.

I am studying the latter with natural satisfaction, when I am roused by a step behind, and looking round see a stranger entering the room. He is a man of middle age, with stooping shoulders, spare, and sallow faced. A pair of large, dark-blue, box-spectacles entirely conceal his eyes; his hair and beard are iron-grey; he is dressed in a dark grey suit, and black silk, peaked cap. A nervous, retiring man he seems; for, after bowing silently towards me, he takes no further notice of my presence, but goes over to one of the windows and gazes abstractly into the street, drumming with his long, white fingers on the window-ledge. I am relieved that he is not conversationally inclined. Though of a sociable disposition, I feel that in my present equivocal situation the less I have to say to people the better.

In a few minutes I hear the post-chaise thundering under the archway that leads to the stables hard by, mingling with the clang of the bell that is attached to the harness. I hasten to the balcony and take my seat in the chaise.

The last thing I see as we drive off are the blue spectacles at the window, directed towards me. I presume there is a pair of eyes, more or less weak or

diseased, behind them, which gaze at me, but all I see is the spectacles.

Just outside the town, jogging quietly along in front of us, I behold a cart laden with wool sacks. A Cossack lies on his stomach on the top of the sacks, leaning on his elbows.

He looks over his shoulder at the sound of the approaching post-chaise, and I recognise Kalatch. In less than a minute we have clattered past them, and two Cossacks' caps have been respectfully raised. Of course I look round, to receive a grin and a wink from Yérack now that the postillion's back is towards him.

I wave my hand, which is instantly responded to by both of the occupants of the cart in a series of wild gesticulations. There is a flash of teeth, and this is the last I see of the Cossacks.

A Russian post-chaise, after the first hour or two, becomes little short of an instrument of torture. Your jaws ache with the incessant knocking together of your teeth. The blood is forced to your head until you expect it to squirt from your nose and ears. This added to the clatter of the springless vehicle, and the eternal clang of the bell, has an indescribable effect on the nerves that is qualified to turn a good-natured man into a devil. Nevertheless, I sit in the bottom of this infernal thing with more complacency than the Czar bowling along the smoothest of roads in his luxurious carriage. What though the white dust is sifted over me from head to foot; choking me, blinding me; that loud-tongued, blatant bell is ringing in my emancipation. Every jolt of this wooden chaise brings me nearer liberty. To walk in the peopled streets once more without the dread that every step that comes up behind me may be that of a gendarme about to arrest me—to be able to look my fellow men in the face and speak my mind without fearing a spy—to be once more Vladimir Alexandrovitch Lubanoff—is worth a whole decade of previous purgatory.

Nevertheless I admit that it is a relief to stretch my cramped limbs and let my churned blood subside at the station where we stop to change horses. And oh, the still greater relief is the consciousness of that roll of notes in my pocket! To be in a position to order a hearty meal and wash the dust from my throat with copicus draughts of beer; to see the postillion fill his stomach and wet his parched throat with the liquor of his choice at my expense, is something to be remembered. Then away again, for a few versts, through the cool shady vistas of a pine wood and out again into the open; to note that the sun is long past the meridian and slopes westward.

At length the spires of Vilna begin to show through the distant haze, and in spite of my excellent disguise and the safeguards in my pockets, I feel a qualm of uneasiness. I wish myself in the train.

Soon we are clattering over the roughly-paved streets in the subdued twilight. Right through the heart of the town we go, and out on the other side; through straggling suburbs, the horses stumbling in the broken roads; the chaise swaying like a boat on a stormy ocean, until at last, here is the station.

A whole hour to wait. I turn wearily from the contemplation of the white-faced clock, and wander to the general waiting-room. Someone has left a newspaper lying on one of the seats. I take it up and retire with it to a corner. The first thing my eyes fall on is a paragraph headed—"Capture of the Renowned Political Criminal, Vladimir Alexandrovitch Lubanoff!"

I read with avidity; the more so, as the greater part of it is entirely new to me. It begins with a short sketch of this remarkable man's career; goes on to describe his execution, the theft of his body and resuscitation by medical students, and finally his capture in a bean field near Kovno whither he had crawled to feed on the beans.

"When taken, the prisoner, who is a man of remarkably powerful frame, was in a frightfully emaciated condition and literally in a starving state. He is now

confined in Kovno gaol, whence he will shortly be transported, under a strong escort, to Petersburg."

It is difficult to realize that this man I have just read about is myself. With my hand over my eyes, I try to conjure up the unfortunate wretch in Kovno gaol, and lose for a moment my own identity in contemplation of him. When I come to myself, I smile behind my false beard.

There is no one in the large hall save myself and the woman who keeps the refreshment stall, facing me. I go over to the counter and drink three cups of tea in succession. I enjoy the tea, and I like the twilight shadows that kindly enfold me, especially as the swing door is beginning to be set in motion. The first arrivals are naturally women.

I return to my corner and watch regretfully whilst a railway servant lights up the hall. And by degrees the motley crowd gathers. The garberdined Jew in his tall, greasy hat, who never ceases to make calculations in a dog-eared note-book; the dainty, slim-waisted officer; the fur-capped trader; in short, the heterogeneous mixture of caste and race to be met with only in a Russian railway station.

At length, from the general movement that commences in the direction of a door opposite the entrance, I presume that the ticket window is open. However, I still remain sitting. I even wait until the first bell is sounding, before I follow in the wake of the stream.

The circular hall, into which I pass, has the centre taken up by a block of offices where the tickets are issued, so that only a wide passage lined on the wall-side with benches, broken here and there by a door, is left free. Just one of the row of windows is open and at it is but one male passenger.

His back is towards me. I advance and wait my turn close behind it. I can see the long white fingers gathering up the change. They are nervous fingers, and a silver coin drops from them and rolls to the open space. I step quickly forward, pick it

up, and on restoring it to its owner find myself confronted by a pair of blue box-spectacles.

It is the man I left at the posting station in Vilna.

For a moment I stare at him in wonderment. How has he got here? Then at once my commonsense tells me that there is nothing at all remarkable in his appearance here. What more natural than that this man should be bound for the same destination as myself? And if he started three-quarters of an hour after me, he would be in ample time for the Western Express.

As he takes the coin from me, I observe a nervous tremor pass over his sickly face, which he checks. Otherwise he makes no sign of recognition, merely bowing with murmured thanks, without even the shadow of a smile as he moves on in the direction of the throng that is clustered round the door leading to the platform.

I take his place. Whilst I am paying for my ticket I hear the door being unlocked and the rush to the platform.

The bell rings for a second time. I who have no luggage to look after loiter behind until the confusion has somewhat subsided, standing in the doorway. I wait until the passengers have mostly taken their seats before I advance to the train.

As usual I attract almost universal attention. People crane their necks out of the carriage windows to look after me. I curse my superior inches. I curse the imposing clerical garb I wear, which, whilst it disguises me, exaggerates my height. Though I walk with as much of careless indifference as I can assume, I feel miserably conscious and intensely uncomfortable.

How gladly would I shrink into the most abject insignificance only to pass unnoticed in a crowd, I who used to feel so proud of being the tallest and most powerful man in my University. For, though others see in me only a "Pope" of uncommonly tall stature, I myself forget not for an instant that I am a fugitive in disguise on whose head a price is set.

I shrink from entering any of the crowded carriages to subject myself to the close scrutiny of so many eyes, and pass on nearly the whole length of the train, seeking one in which I shall be more secluded.

The guard approaches me, cap in hand. He signs to me to follow him, and I have to retrace my steps to the other end of the train before he pauses at the door of a carriage and invites me to take my seat in it.

"You will not be crowded here, Holy Father," he observes.

I could find it in my heart to laugh at the obsequious attention I receive everywhere.

I thank him, slip something into his hand, and sink to a corner with a sigh of relief. Almost directly the bell clashes forth for the last time. Doors are slammed, the whistle shrieks, and panting, creaking, groaning, as if under protest, the train with its living, palpitating freight moves slowly westward.

CHAPTER XV.

MY MYSTERIOUS COMPANION.

THERE is a lamp in the roof of the carriage, furnished with a semi-circular green shade on a frame, which can be drawn so as to enclose and exclude the light. At present it is only partially drawn, consequently, whilst one-half of the carriage is illuminated, the other half is shrouded in gloom. I have, involuntarily, sunk into a corner on the darkened side. Facing me, full in the light, sits a military man, cutting the leaves of an illustrated periodical. Myself unseen, I may study his appearance at my leisure.

He is of the well-nourished, burly, prosperous type, of any age between fifty and sixty. His half-open, sensuous eyes have a crowd of humorous wrinkles in the corners as if their owner could enjoy a good joke as well as a good dinner. His loose mouth has

the corners tending upwards ; his nose, his cheeks, his double chin are fleshy—his complexion florid. He has removed his cap, displaying a bald, bullet head encircled by a thick, short fringe of grey hair. Whilst he turns the leaves of his comic paper, I observe that he wears a diamond ring on the third finger of his right hand. Taking him all in all I pronounce him to be a good-natured, harmless animal, without convictions, save on the subject of cooking. A *bon camarade*, in short, and nothing more.

On extending my observations I discover that he is not my only fellow-passenger. On a line with me, in the opposite corner, there is a dark object dimly discernible. A motionless object, whether male or female, sleeping or waking I know not, but perfectly still.

I soon forget the existence of both. Gazing out of the window, away to the narrow, lurid stripe that spans the horizon like a band of ribbon—the one bit of colour in the darkness—I muse of many things, until gradually the deep orange and red fade into the night, and my eyelids begin to grow heavy. I lay my head back and the last thing I am aware of is the stout figure of the soldier half reclined on the seat opposite, with his mouth gaping like an open mousetrap. Sometimes I start into consciousness as my head slips sideways, and there is always the same picture of the military man, with the lamp-light falling full on his sleeping face, for he has not thought it necessary to shut it off. And along with it is the feeling of a motionless, mysterious being in the far corner. Thus the hours wear away until the stopping of the train arouses me fully. The military man is on his legs, energetically hauling a small portmanteau out of the net above his head. His rug lies ready strapped on the seat.

"Kovno! Kovno!" calls the guard.

Instinctively I shrink into my corner with my heart thumping against my ribs. Kovno! the scene of my recent terrible experiences. It comes to me with a shock that I am here, though had I given it

a thought I should have been prepared, as my route obliges me to pass through it. I peer out at the people passing to and fro as if I expected to recognise some of them. Two or three sleepy porters bear luggage along to the van. About half-a-dozen passengers, all of the male sex, enter to the platform, pocketing their tickets and their change. I am thankful that no one finds his way here. There is a clock full in view. I observe that it indicates ten minutes past three; then the guard's head appears at the window.

"Twenty minutes here, gentlemen," he informs us.

The figure in the distant corner stirs, but subsides again without speaking. I reply that I am too lazy to leave my seat. It is a long twenty minutes. At last it is over and we are roaring onward through the darkness. I put up my feet and bestow myself as comfortably as circumstances permit.

The motion of a train, with its monotonous accompaniment of sound, readily induces somnolence with me. I fall almost at once into a sound sleep.

I awake with a violent start and with a strange sensation of uneasiness. Surely I heard something fall? I feel as if there is something oppressing me that I must be rid of. These combined sensations make me open my eyes suddenly with a stare.

A face that has been bending towards me is being withdrawn. A pair of piercing grey eyes that have been gazing on me are being hastily covered with a pair of blue spectacles—they gleam on me now in the pale morning light. The pallid face, a shade more ghastly, and twitching oddly at this moment, is the same I had first seen at the posting station at Börlitch, and again at the Vilna railway station.

This, then, is my mysterious travelling companion

For some moments I can only stare at him. If the ghost of my long departed grandfather had risen before me, I should not have felt more surprised and dismayed. Who and what is he? Is it by chance or by design that he always crosses my path thus? Is it

possible that it can be a——? His voice, heard by me for the first time, interrupts my surmises. He puts up his thin, white hand, and coughs behind it. A sickly smile spreads over his features, and he begins—

"You are surprised, Holy Father, at what may seem impudent curiosity on the part of a stranger, but your appearance is indeed—hem—somewhat strange. The fact is your hair has come off!"

"My hair?" I stammer, not taking in the meaning of his words at once.

Then my hand goes up to my head and with a rush of nameless horror I feel my own short hair. Great God! my wig is gone! I hear a laugh.

"It is all right," comes a voice as sounding from a distance through the rushing of many waters. "Your wig is safe: it has only slipped to your shoulder, Holy Father."

Another laugh.

With shaking fingers I seek and try to readjust my flowing locks. Large drops that have formed on my brow, fall to my knee as I do so.

My companion leaves his seat. He pauses in the centre of the carriage, and looks up and down the passage that runs through the train, ere he comes up to me.

"Allow me to assist you, Holy Father," he says coolly. "Your hands are unsteady."

He puts his hand to my crown and twitches and pulls at my wig as he speaks. His face is close to mine, and the blue glasses are directed straight at me. I cannot see, but I feel that the keen, grey eyes behind them are searching me through.

"If I could but be sure," I hear him mutter.

"Sure of what?" I falter, scarce knowing what I say.

"That—that—you are——" He hesitates.

"Are what? whom?" I gasp, half rising in my agitation.

He draws a long breath, stoops to his feet and picks up my tall hat which had rolled to the floor from my knee when I awoke, and presents it to me ere he speaks again.

"That you are—what I suspect—what I feel *almost* sure you are——" Again he stops short, and I know that his gaze devours me.

I lay my hand on his arm and vainly strive to pierce with my eager vision the dark-blue glasses that place me at such a disadvantage.

He quietly removes them and returns my gaze unflinchingly, though with anxious devouring inquiry.

"Well?" he whispers.

"Why wear you these?" I whisper in return, pointing to the spectacles.

"For the same reason, methinks, that you wear these luxuriant locks," he replies, lifting one of the long tresses that cover my shoulders. Somehow our hands meet at this juncture. The doubt in his eyes gives place to a look of security and glowing exultation, whilst his lithe fingers grasp mine ever tighter. And like the morning mist stirred by a sudden breeze, my doubts and fears disperse and gather again. One moment my heart swells with the conviction that I look into the face of a brother; the next it wavers. To me at least it is a matter of life and death, and this man *may* be an emissary of the police, after all, acting cleverly a part to entrap me.

He sees the relapse to suspicion in my features, and smiles, raising his brows.

"Still doubtful?" he observes. "Then, brother, as I am without a shadow of doubt, I will introduce myself. My name is——"

"No!" I burst in almost violently, my last hesitation flying before a rush of confidence. "No, you shall not! I speak first! I am Vladimir Alexandrovitch Lubanoff!"

As I pronounce my name there flashes up in his eyes the light of a great wonder. It seems for some moments to strike him dumb. When at length he finds his speech, he stammers forth—

"Lubanoff! . . Is it possible? Why it was only yesterday that I heard of his recapture! The report then has been false?"

"Not so. I was taken and am free again. The day before yesterday I lay in Kovno gaol and now I am here! And now you—who are you?" I ask, consumed with curiosity.

"I am Michael Bakunin!"

At the familiar name—the name of the man I have been wont to swear by, to worship from afar, whose creed I have blindly followed since first my youthful mind formed an idea—an excess of intense emotion overcomes me. Involuntarily I raise the hand I still hold to my lips as I murmur in trembling accents—

"My father, I am proud of this hour in which I may look into thy face!"

I think of his six years in the fortress of Peter and Paul; his five years in the terrible Schlüsselburg beneath the level of the Neva, and that awful tramp to Siberia in chains! It is all written in the white, drawn face with its twitching muscles. At my words, a smile that is full of sweetness plays about his mouth; and there is a ring of enthusiasm in his singularly mellow voice, as he replies—

"Thou makest me ashamed, brother; for, after all, it is little I have done to forward the cause. Thou hast done more, though I number double thy years; and right joyful am I to congratulate thee on thy escape! In truth thy experiences must have been unique. Hanged, resuscitated, and God knows what besides! If thou shouldst ever have a fancy to write thy autobiography, people will scarcely credit that hanging episode. I believed it not myself when I heard of it first in Tambov, but everywhere I heard it verified. Then yesterday at Börlitch the station-master told me of thy recapture near Kovno. But by all that is wonderful, how was it with the hanging? Some say the hangman was bribed to bungle."

"No need to bribe a Russian to bungle anything," I reply with irony. "He bungled as a matter of course, and he carried it to the length of cutting me

down too soon. Had he not done that, I should have been undone indeed!"

Bakunin shivers. "Thou hast endured much, Vladimir Alexandrovitch. Faugh, to be hung by the neck. The sensation of it must have been——"

"It was most uncomfortable," I put in drily, checking a strong inclination to shiver likewise, at the recollection of that eternity of horrible "suspension."

The guard passes through the carriage, glancing casually towards us, where we sit with our heads together. Fortunately, Bakunin has resumed his spectacles; nevertheless as the guard appears unawares, Bakunin starts. Though his purpose is as strong as adamant, his martyred nerves quiver like the strings of an æolian harp, under the slightest touch. He starts, his face twitches at a look, a word, a sound; not that he has turned coward, but that much suffering has robbed him of the control of his nerves. Observing this I resolve to take him under my wing and cover him with my assurance.

I sign to the guard and ask him to give me the correct time. I detain him with questions, relative to the journey we are making, to all of which he answers with becoming deference. When I see fit to release him and we are alone again Bakunin sighs.

"I envy thy nerves," he says. "Schlüsselburg with its fever and ague played the deuce with mine."

What a talk we have after that! Plying me with eager questions, my companion gleans from me the story of my adventures. Only on one point am I reticent, that of my sojourn with Maruscha. A strange shyness makes me dumb on the subject of her devotion to me. I speak of my friends, Ivan and Pavel, and leave him to infer that it was the aid of the latter I sought after my escape from Professor Schleemann's cellar. When I come to speak of Yérack, my listener continually interrupts me with exclamations.

"Well done, Cossack! Bless the Cossack! I would he were here that I might embrace him!"

At the scene of my parting from my two deliverers, I see him furtively wipe a tear from his cheek.

And now it is my turn to listen with bated breath to a tale of horrors so appalling that at times the blood in my veins seems to freeze. Surely no man save Bakunin ever lived to tell the like! That tramp along the interminable highway to Siberia in the company of felons; those nights in the loathsome *étapes*, what language could describe? Bakunin touches but lightly on it, yet my flesh creeps. And furthermore, after his escape, those wanderings through trackless forests where naught breaks the awful silence of the profound solitudes save the howl of the famished wolf—half clad, pinched with hunger, benumbed with cold. Twice was he picked up insensible by kindly-disposed peasants, but for whose aid he must have perished many times.

I hearken spellbound, nor heed the flight of time. Meanwhile the sun has melted the curtain of mist that shrouded his glory and shines full into the carriage; yet it is not the heat of the sun that has brought that vivid flush to Bakunin's wan cheeks. Now that his story is finished, I reproach myself for having allowed him to revive those terrible memories. The talking and the excitement have been too much for him. He leans back exhausted and puts his hand to his side.

I am thankful that the train already begins to slacken speed, and we creep into a station, so that I may procure him some brandy. I descend boldly to the platform and hasten to the refreshment-room, conscious of no man's regard save that of Michael Bakunin. Under his eyes I feel capable of walking into the mouth of a fiery furnace.

I purchase a couple of large "piroggen." I hastily swallow a brandy and soda, and convey another to my friend in the carriage. He sips a small quantity of it and would return me the glass.

"Take it all," I murmur, bending towards him and pushing the glass back again to his lips. "It

will carry thee over the frontier. There is nothing like brandy for steadying the nerves."

He obeys me, shuddering after the draught, like a child after a nauseous dose of medicine. I induce him to eat a portion of one of the "piroggen." Poor Bakunin, his many long fasts have made him forget how to make a good meal. The train has scarcely regained its normal speed ere his chin rests on his breast.

I softly draw the green curtain over the window, to shield him from the sun, and leaving him to his sleep, I devote myself to the pasties. Depend on it I do them justice! After this I ponder on the strange things I have heard, my eyes ever wandering to the motionless form opposite to make sure that it was not a dream and that verily before me sits Michael Bakunin in the flesh.

Meanwhile, rumbling and roaring through the dreary land, we draw near the frontier.

CHAPTER XVI.

SAVED!

"WE shall be at Verballen in half an hour, Holy Father," the guard informs me as he takes our tickets and passes on out of sight.

Bakunin, who has slept profoundly until aroused by the guard, has shaken off his lethargy. He pushes back the curtain and gazes out on the landscape I have been studying. It is a sorry one. An arid, sandy waste, where the shivering grey poplar has taken the place of the dark, green pine, which forms the one noble feature in Russia's grim and rugged face. Here and there a smoke-blackened hut dots the flat plain, with its patches of potatoes and hemp. Herds of gaunt pigs, flocks of screaming geese and a few lean cows, seek a scant subsistence from the coarse, burnt herbage. And the barrenness of the

land is stamped on the blank, expressionless faces of the inhabitants. Half-naked children peer dumbly, with dull pale eyes from under shocks of tawny hair, at the moving train. Peasants pause and stare like oxen vacantly. Nowhere is there sign of mirth. Yet there is a weird fascination in the scene. It is unique. In this corner of the earth nature seems to crouch like an old crone, old and grey and voiceless. She exists, and that is all. There is no light in her eyes nor colour in her sparse locks, nor is there a trace of beauty in her wan and wrinkled face. The sounds which issue from her gnarled throat are harsh and brief.

At length my companion turns from it with a sigh and begins to question me.

"What is thy destination, brother?"

"I go to Berlin."

"Hast thou friends there?"

"I have a friend—one. Konrad Rosen. We were fellow-students a couple of years ago in Petersburg. After he took his degree he went to Berlin at the instance of his uncle, who was retiring, and wished his nephew to succeed to his practice. A good thing for Rosen. He has fallen on his feet."

There is a pause. Bakunin seems to meditate. Presently he resumes.

"Hast thou any future plan in view?"

"No; I must do what comes in my way," I reply, somewhat dolefully. "I should like to follow my profession, but a practice is not picked up easily. I have a vague notion of working my passage out to the new world, only——"

I complete not the sentence. It is of Maruscha I think.

"Why not come with me to Switzerland?" he suggests. "In Zurich there are many friends of the cause. They will find work for thee."

I hesitate. Even if I had not Maruscha to meet in Berlin, thinking as I now do, I would not accompany Bakunin to Zurich; that nest of rabid, social

democrats. I am unswerving in my determination to work in future on the gradual, evolutionary principle, which, having its source in the soul, begins by slow and gentle process to fit the individual for the liberty which is his birthright, but which he is incapable of holding without a previous training in reasonable self-restraint.

Yet I feel the utter futility of entering on any explanation of my change of opinions with Bakunin, of all men; moreover, I had resolved to preserve silence on the subject, being sick of bluster. Too much has there been of it. And what have been the results? A certain number of assassinations; some noisy explosions of dynamite, and no more. When the smoke has cleared, all has been found to be as before. But Bakunin awaits my reply, so I say—

"I expect a friend to join me in Berlin by appointment."

Probably I look conscious, or he suspects the truth by my hesitating manner; for he raises his brows and inquires with a peculiar smile—

"A woman?"

"My betrothed," I answer.

"Ah," he ejaculates. And immediately the smile dies from his face, giving place to a look of deep sadness. He speaks bitterly.

"It is a mistake, Vladimir Alexandrovitch—a mistake I made myself more than twenty years ago. My poor Natalie; to what extremities have I brought her! Through what waters of affliction has she had to pass for my sake. And the children she has borne me in anguish; they have never known the guidance of a father; his existence has ever been a shadow cast over their young lives and over their mother's heart, to rob them of her smiles. Tender heart! It was always too full of tears to admit of joy! Such men as we should never marry."

The truth of his words goes straight home to me with woeful conviction, yet what avails it now?

Maruscha's heart is knit so closely with mine that to tear them asunder would be death to both. Henceforth she must bear every smart of mine. At least there is one consolation, that come what may, we shall be together; not enduring apart, like Bakunin and his Natalie, unless—unless——

Oh, the terrible doubt! I dare not approach it with the probing knife. I shrink from dissecting it. I turn from it shuddering, though its shadow still darkens the sunlight. It is always there!

"True, too true, Michael Michaelevitch!" I murmur. "But it is too late! I cannot even wish that we had never met, for we love!"

Bakunin takes my hand and presses it warmly.

"Since it is so, my son, make the best of it and hope for the best. 'Man is born to sorrow as the sparks fly upwards,' yet not sorrow only. As the humblest blade of grass gets its share of the sunshine and dew of Heaven, so every heart has its moments of rapture; make the most of thine. There is noble use, too, in the love of a good woman; it is an inspiration to a man."

He gets no farther, for the scream of the whistle and the diminishing speed of the train tells us we are nearing Verballen.

Bakunin hastily produces from his pocket a small phial, and pushing up his spectacles he pours a small quantity of a whitish fluid into the hollow of his hand, and laves his eyes with it; wincing painfully as he does so. This done and the spectacles replaced, he throws the phial out of the window.

I know not how he feels—his eyes, those windows of the soul, being hidden—but when we draw up at the platform my brain is in a whirl with excitement. I notice an unnatural flush in his hollow cheeks, and at intervals a nervous twitching contracts his face.

He has his little green, leather-bound passport in his fingers as we are entering the station. I take it from him and glance into it, reading: "Loris Simeonitch Davidenko, Writer."

I repeat it over aloud, and return the passport with the remark, "It is as well to know thy name, and mine is Nikor Andreivitch Tcherevin. Markest thou?"

He nods; yet I doubt if he hears my words.

The crowd is surging towards the door, and we join it. We emerge in a very dirty, but spacious hall, and advance to a circular counter which encloses a number of officials and a large table, at which some of them are seated.

Already an official approaches me and holds out a small, fat hand for my passport. He is a short, stout, choleric-looking man, with a smooth moon-face, his eyes appearing like slits above the half circles formed by his fat cheeks. His closely buttoned uniform seems ready to burst, so blown out is he with fat and self-importance. He throws his head back and examines the passport through a *pince-nez*, glancing over my person the while to verify the written description. In less than a minute it is in my possession again. Bakunin, who is at my elbow, comes next. The official opens the document and reads the preliminary permit of absence. He turns the leaf to the description of the traveller's person.

"Put up your spectacles, sir," the official requests.

Bakunin complies, and displays a pair of eyes inflamed and bloodshot beyond recognition.

The official makes a sign that he is satisfied, and the sheltering glasses are replaced.

But what is the matter? The slits that permit that important individual opposite us to see, are widening. His brows go up to his shaven hair.

"Humph," he puffs. "What is this? Hair brown and grey mixed. I see no brown hair! Your hair is grey—entirely grey. Not a single brown hair! Regret it, sir; but I cannot permit you to proceed. A serious inaccuracy—must be inquired into."

For a moment Bakunin seems as if paralysed. His jaw drops.

"It is impossible," he gasps at length. "Let me see it."

"Sufficient that I tell you that it is so!" exclaims the official testily. "Think you I know not how to read!" and he turns away.

I stretch my hand across the counter and lay it on the official's sleeve.

"One word, sir," I say, looking at him meaningly. "I think this matter might be explained. Loris Simeonitch is an old and valued friend of mine. I can vouch for him. The error in his passport is a trifling one; due, undoubtedly, to carelessness on the part of the official who filled it in. It will seriously inconvenience my friend to be detained."

The official eyes me with a sternness that gradually wavers. I think he reads the meaning in my looks. He makes as if he would reply; however, I am determined not to permit him until a certain silent transfer has taken place, for the carrying out of which I am watching my opportunity. I hastily take from my pocket the leave of absence, and along with it some rouble notes which I keep conveniently under my hand, as I thrust the document towards him.

"Look; read that!" I cry. "You will see who I am and to whom I am answerable. I think when a respected Father of the Church vouches for a friend in a case like this it is enough."

He takes the paper from me slowly, with the notes beneath it. A dreamy expression comes into his oily face, and somehow the notes disappear like magic. They must have gone up his sleeve, for there is nothing in his hand save the paper, which he unfolds and glances over.

"Ah, well; if that is the case, Holy Father—as the matter stands—under those particular circumstances—as you vouch for the gentleman——"

He stops short, blows out his cheeks, bows, and finally waves his hand as if dismissing the affair. Then, without once looking at either of us, proceeds to the examination of another passport. The examination of luggage is in full operation. The scene is

a wild one. We pick our way amongst the effects, sometimes stepping over wearing apparel that is strewn on the dirty stone floor, winding our way in and out amid the excited, gesticulating groups.

"Luggage, Holy Father?" inquires one of the many loungers who hang about with a view to earning a few copecs by lifting luggage and placing it ready for the inspection of the custom-house officials. "If your Holiness will describe it I will bring it to him. He need take no trouble."

I remember the magnificent piece of acting recommended by my wily Cossack friend, as a means of accounting for my lack of luggage, but though the extraordinary circumstances of my life have forced me to study the art of deception, I have not been able to attain to Yérack's keen enjoyment in the practising of it. My attested passport is in my pocket; everyone about me is too exclusively engrossed in their own affairs to trouble their heads about those of other people. No one save the official who saw our passports would see anything strange in the absence of our effects, and he carefully avoids even glancing our way. Therefore I resolve not to burden my conscience with a gratuitous lie.

"Thanks, little father. I need not thy help," I reply carelessly, and pass on.

However, the fellow takes not his answer. He keeps pace with me.

"I will fetch the Holy Father's effects for the love of Saint Ivan, whom he resembles, if he will but condescend to describe them," he urges.

I turn on him with a frown. "Have I not spoken?" I respond, in a voice of subdued wrath; "trouble me not further."

He shrinks away. He is a ragged, down-trodden looking creature, and I have scarcely uttered the harsh words ere I relent, and signing to him, put a small coin into his palm. Yet the next moment I blush for his manhood as he stoops like a slave and kisses the hem of my kaftan.

All this while Bakunin has never opened his lips. I observe that every vestige of colour has left his face; its hue is now ghastly.

Having crossed the hall, I sit down on a bench against the wall and near the door. He drops to it beside me with a sort of moan smothered in the utterance. I quake for him.

"Keep up, my brother!" I murmur, encouragingly. "Only a few minutes more!" For the first bell is ringing.

He mutters something that I fail to catch.

Good heavens! is my companion going to collapse? What would be the consequences of such a catastrophe? I picture myself conveying his inanimate body along the platform under a hundred curious eyes; or worse still, the train moving away out of the station, leaving me and my helpless charge behind. In a fever of anxiety I watch the laggard minute-hand of the clock.

The third bell at last! Now for it! The door is open, and the passengers are streaming forth.

I rise. Bakunin gets on his feet. He moves his head strangely from side to side, as if something constrained his throat. He staggers and regains his equilibrium by a sudden counter-movement.

I hear someone near us observe: "Look how drunk that man is! And he is with that tall priest too!"

The remark draws on us the attention of all within earshot.

I glare fiercely at the speaker and put my arm under Bakunin's.

"My friend is not drunk, sir!" I say sternly. "He is taken ill."

The man apologises. We get into the current of the crowd, that half carries us through the doorway. Then setting my teeth I walk steadily with Bakunin in the direction of a carriage. His tottering feet move in unison with mine to the door and give way under him there as if he had been cut across the knees. The breath leaves his breast in a long-drawn

sigh as I take him in my arms and deposit him, insensible, on the seat.

Scarcely have I entered the train after him when a man approaches and looks in. He sees not Bakunin, but only the vacant seats at the far end of the carriage, and mounting to the steps, beckons to someone.

"Here," he calls; "plenty of room, and a smoking compartment."

"I beg your pardon, sir," I interpose. "But it is my duty to inform you that my friend here is taken ill; it may be of some infectious disease."

The man pokes in his head and stares at the senseless body bundled on the seat. Then he lifts his hat and moves away without a word. Presently the door is banged. I wipe the great beads of perspiration from my brow, and with my heart swelling with thankfulness and unspeakable relief, I whisper—"Saved!"

CHAPTER XVII.

I AM MYSELF AGAIN.

In a few minutes we are at Edkuen, the first Prussian station, and Bakunin still lies insensible. I have laid him down on his back as well as the limits of the seat will permit, his legs hanging over the end. I put my head out of the window and sign to a railway servant as the train stops.

"Quick, my man," I say, thrusting money into his hand. "Get me some cognac."

He dashes off, for we make but a brief halt here, and the train is in motion when he jumps to the step and extends to me a flask bottle, though not my change. This he only makes a feint of giving me, and in the act inadvertently stumbles to the platform. I cannot help laughing at the dodge.

After I have got a little of the restorative into Bakunin, he moves. A little more, and he struggles

to a sitting posture. I support him. Presently he puts his hand to his brow, and after a considerable silence he falters—

"Where are we now? I—I must have been asleep."

"Steaming away to Königsberg, brother, with the Russian frontier behind us," I cry exultantly.

To my amaze his head falls to my shoulders and he bursts into sobs.

"All right, my friend! Thou wilt soon be thyself again. Thou art weak and all this has been too much for thee. Take some more cognac."

I put the flask to his lips. He turns from it.

"No more," he says, and in quivering accents expressive of profound dejection. "Used up, used up, Bakunin. Thy end must indeed be near when womanish tears disgrace thy manhood in spite of thee!"

I strive to console him. "And is it not natural? Think of the constant strain on thy nerves, going on for many months. If thy constitution had not been of iron thou wouldst not be here. However, now it is at an end and thou canst rest and recover thyself."

"Thanks to thee," he falters. "How Natalie will bless thee when she hears! If I get to Zurich alive I expect to meet her there. Poor Natalie! in any case it will be a wrench to thy heart-strings to hear of my death or to be confronted by the cadaverous ghost of thy former husband!"

He relapses into silence, and presently I can tell by his heavy breathing that he has fallen into a doze. Thus hour after hour passes by, Bakunin sleeping and rousing, to mutter half dazed, a few words; then dropping asleep again, whilst I sit ruminating and gazing out on the ever-varying panorama that unrolls and disappears before me. The pictures are dazzling. Hamlets gleaming red and white amid orchards where yellow, crimson and purple fruits glisten. Woods ablaze in autumn foliage, pastures rich in brown and yellow, dotted with mottled cows, and stretches of yellow stubble. Full lavishly has Nature painted up

her ageing face, yet with the skill of an artist, pleasing with wealth of exquisitely blended colour where formerly she charmed with her tender grace.

Königsberg is reached and I leave the train and procure something to eat, indifferent now to the sensation my appearance may be creating. I arouse Bakunin to take some food. It is a difficult task. Fatigue, exposure, hunger, anxiety, have made sad havoc with him. The removal of the strain has caused him to collapse, so that now he seems scarcely equal to the effort of moving his jaws. When we are under way again, I dispose him as comfortably as I can, and he slips at once back to the wonder-working land of slumber.

The sun slopes to the west and sinks out of sight; the shadows gather, the landscape fades, and we are rushing and roaring through the night. I dream uneasy dreams and start into consciousness out of uneasy attitudes, only to repeat the same process. And another morn dawns and glows into day, and the sun rides in the pale zenith. The features of the country have gradually changed. Habitations crowd. Every scrap of ground is under cultivation. We are approaching the centre of utilitarianism—Berlin.

The sight of its distant spires imbues me with sudden animation.

Bakunin still sleeps. How he has slept! I shake him.

"Rouse thee, brother!" I cry. "In a few minutes we shall be in Berlin."

He starts up. "Already?" he exclaims.

"Already." I laugh. "The journey has seemed interminable to me. But thou hast spent the time to thy advantage in the land of Nod! Thou art the better for thy sojourn there—not so?"

"Yes, I feel better," he replies dreamily. He stretches himself, yawns, and removes his spectacles. His eyes are still somewhat inflamed, but the long rest has done wonders to recover them, as also their

owner. His very expression is changed. The care-worn, haggard look has toned down to something less intense. The lines about his mouth have relaxed and there is more of repose in his features.

"Thou wilt not go on to Zurich to-day?" I question.

"Yes, I must. Natalie and my friends will be anxious about me. Thank God, I feel equal to it now."

I know it would be vain to remonstrate, though a night's rest between sheets and a respite from the harrowing motion and noise of the train is what he most needs. Bakunin is not the man to be moved from a purpose. It remains for me, therefore, to see to his creature comforts and stay with him until his train leaves.

Alas! there is no one anxious about me, no one waiting my arrival.

Yet in spite of it, as we roll into the magnificent station, into the midst of civilisation, and descend to the wide platform amidst well-dressed Europeans, I feel a strange stir at my heart; an excited hurrying of my pulses that can scarcely be ascribed to despondency. In this unaccustomed atmosphere of freedom I feel, under the curious glances that are directed towards me, like a youth at a masquerade, who revels in his good disguise.

After making inquiries about trains to Zurich and ascertaining that the next one leaves in a couple of hours, I conduct Bakunin to the station hotel. And here, regardless of his dumb remonstrance conveyed by a series of signs behind the waiter's back, I order a rare good dinner.

"How couldst thou——" he is beginning, the waiter having bustled away, when I cut him short.

"Brother, not a word. It is fit that we celebrate this auspicious occasion in proper style, and thanks to the generous Cossack, we can do it. As thou valuest my friendship, do justice to the feast."

When the meal is spread, I hasten to fill the tall glasses with sparkling champagne, and putting one into his hand, I hold up the other with the words—

"Let us first pledge the donor of our feast. Vivat Yérack!"

"Cling, clang" go the glasses, and we both drain them. By-and-by a smile begins to play round Bakunin's mouth, his tongue loosens, and I make his acquaintance in a new character—that of the humourist. Touches that bring moisture to the eye of the listener, yet shake him with uncontrollable laughter, flash like gay sparks along the dark train of some awful situation, telling that this man of many moods and many sides could be touched by the ludicrous in the very presence of death. I hear occasionally his musical laugh, low, yet essentially mirthful, and catch a glimpse of the breadth of nature which has been powerful to attract so many. I let him talk, and listen silently, delighted to know him in his expansive mood. It is difficult to realise that he, who sits before me with the mobile, animated features, over which memories grave and gay pass like grey and golden clouds over a summer sky, is he who lay erewhile before me with the same features frozen in the ghastly semblance of death. It is this amazing elasticity of spirits with which he is endowed. With the lightness and velocity of a cork they rise to the surface after the heaviest pressure.

At length he returns to the present and jumps up.

"By Saint Michael, let me not miss the train!" he exclaims. "Come, we will see how the time goes."

We issue forth to the station. Bakunin is a new man. He walks with a firm, decided tread which is natural to him; holding himself erect. There is something little short of majestic in his carriage. Though his height is rather below than above the average, his head somewhat sunk between his shoulders, there is yet both dignity and authority in his gait and mien. Not the most indiscriminating observer but would see in him one above the common.

We find that in a quarter of an hour the train starts, and after procuring a ticket I see him comfortably

ensconced in the corner of the carriage. Standing beside him with my foot on the step, we chat pleasantly on indifferent topics, for there are others in the carriage, until the guard disturbs me to shut the door.

The last I see of Bakunin, as the train bears him out of my sight, is with smiling and animated face, leaning from the window to call to me a cheerful "Au revoir!"

And now I am at liberty to seek my old associate, Karl Rosen. In a few minutes I am "Unter den Linden," mounted on one of those high-wheeled Berlin droskies, conspicuous to the view of the double stream of individuals that pour in both directions, not one of whom but turns curious eyes on me. A Russian Priest is undoubtedly a rare sight in Berlin, and few even know to what nationality I belong.

"Siehe, da fährt ein Perser!" I heard a woman exclaim to her child. And again, "Ein Türk! Was für ein grosser Mann!"

"The Stein-Strasse is one of the many streets that run into the great centre—"Unter den Linden." We turn into it, and presently halt before a large house that has a balcony covered with creepers, There is an ornamental metal table, and chairs disposed amid a grove of leaf plants. One of the chairs is occupied by a young man in whom, spite of his clean-shaven chin, trim whiskers, and general air of lofty respectability, I at once recognise the converted Philistine, erewhile of the University of Petersburg, Karl Rosen. He is gracefully smoking a fragrant Havanna, whose grateful fumes reach my nostrils, and there is a cup of what I conjecture to be Mocha before him.

My droski stopping at the door, he rises and leans over the railings of the balcony to bestow on me a prolonged and astonished stare. I wave my hand excitedly, to which he makes no response, only staring the harder, so I pay the driver and ring Doctor Rosen's bell, whose name on a large brass plate is announced below it.

He occupies a flat on the *bel-étage*, and when the street door flies open I mount the flight of stone steps, three at a time. A neat maidservant holds open the door of the "Wohnung."

"Your master is at home; can I see him?" I inquire in German; for like most Russians of the educated class I am a tolerably good linguist.

For some moments she regards me with eyes as round as saucers before she sufficiently recovers from her surprise at sight of me, to reply to my question.

"Yes, sir; step in, sir." She precedes me across a hall and pauses at the door of a room, which must be that one with the balcony, to ask—

"What name, sir?"

I hesitate for a moment. "Herr Lubanoff," I reply at length.

She turns the handle and announces me; then with a last, curious glance, leaves me within the room.

A figure stands between me and the light—a dapper little figure, the sight of which awakens in me a host of pleasant recollections. I step quickly up to it, grasp an unresponsive hand and shake it heartily, forgetting for the moment how disguised beyond the possibility of recognition I am, as I exclaim:

"Don Karlos, old man! how goes it with thee?"

His eyes scan me from head to foot and his hand lies in mine as limp as that of a lay figure. "Mein Gott! Waken up, brother! Surely thou hast not forgotten thine old comrade, Vlasha?"

I laugh hysterically and keep working his arm up and down more violently than ever.

"Vlasha," he repeats stupidly, "Vlasha?"

Gazing at me always, his grasp begins to tighten, his features to work. "Vlasha—it cannot be Vlasha Lubanoff; he was—hanged?" He says this dubiously, in a wavering, undecided manner. Doubtless my familiar voice and other signs speak to his heart.

"Was he? was he?"

I fling my clerical hat to the far end of the room; my wig, my false beard follow it; and, twitching up the skirts of my silken kaftan, I cut a caper before him.

"Himmlischer Vater! Vlasha! Is it possible?" he gasps, and then the tender-hearted little fellow bursts into tears. I am grave in an instant. My hands descend on his shapely shoulders, and we look each other in the face. The tears are streaming down his, and my vision grows dim at sight of them, and him.

We kiss each other solemnly and fervently, on both cheeks.

Half an hour later we are seated with our feet under the same mahogany, with coffee before us and cigars between our lips. Between the puffs I relate my adventures. Soon Rosen forgets his favourite weed. In the intensity of his interest he allows it to go out whilst he holds it suspended between his fingers. Now and then I hear his short, quickened breathings, or his low, agitated laugh.

The room is quite dark when I arrive at the end of my story. A long pause ensues, during which nothing is heard save the rumble of vehicles and the subdued stir of life in the street below. Then the striking of a match and the kindling of Rosen's cigar. The red glow of it, brightening and reddening as he smokes, is all I can distinguish in the gloom. He is the first to break the silence.

"Vlasha," he begins, "now that thou hast made this great sacrifice for the weal of Russia, what better is she for it? Has it advanced the cause? What better is she for those hundreds of devoted men, and even women, who have perished on the scaffold for her redemption? Is tyranny less rampant? In all these years have we advanced a single step? Seest thou not at last that thy methods are wrong? There is no help, no efficacy in the extreme measures you adopt—yet (with an impatient sigh) I know that I only waste my breath in pointing this out to thee. How often have we discussed it of old, and to what

issue? My advice but confirmed thee in thy violent, thy mad notions. And now, I suppose, thou wilt hasten to league thyself with the red-hot social democrats here, and get into more mischief. As thou hast not a turn for oratory, they will put thee to their dirty, secret work."

"What if at last I have become a convert to thy gentler creed, Karlos?" I quietly observe.

"No such luck," he responds with a touch of bitterness.

"Well, well, I will not insist, but perhaps time may show."

"Vlasha, dear old man! if I could only believe that——"

"Believe nothing," I interrupt, "until thou hast proof. A man must have lived his theories before he has earned the right to talk of them. Therefore I am mute. In this blatant world one gets sick of this eternal talk, talk. Only one thing I will observe, that the mind of a man is liable to undergo strange metamorphoses in passing through the Valley of the Shadow, and if he emerges to find himself still on this side of the grave, the chances are that he sees things in a different light. The mysterious journey opens the windows of his soul."

There is another silence, during which Rosen bestirs himself to light the lamp, that with its rose-coloured shade illumines with a warm glow this cosy bachelor's sitting-room.

"Now I must leave thee for a couple of hours or so, to visit patients," he observes, placing at my elbow newspapers and a new book. "By Stepniak," he informs me of the latter; "it will interest thee. And on that side-table thou wilt find smoking materials. Make thyself at home."

Left alone, I feel too restless and excited to read. I wander about, examining the pictures on the walls; the books, the knick-knacks, and finally some albums, in one of which I soon become absorbed. It is

entirely devoted to Rosen's University friends. Almost every face is familiar to me, and awaken in me memories of happy, careless days that can never return, and others that make me unspeakably sad for those who are mouldering in an early grave. There is Ivan's honest phiz looking at me with his thoughtful, deep-set eyes, and Pavel's firm and fiery one. There is poor Vasil and those others who went with me to the scaffold, but, unlike myself, returned not to light and life again; and there am I, in different stages of my student existence. Lingering in contemplation of these I note not the flight of time, and before I have begun to expect Rosen's return he is there again. The round-eyed maid immediately announces that supper is served and Rosen puts his arm through mine and conducts me to the dining-room.

"Thou art a lucky fellow, Karlos," I say, as I watch him dissecting a roast duckling; "to drop into a thing like this just when the time was ripe for thee to do so?"

"I have nothing to complain of," he replies complacently, and he insinuates the point of the carving knife into the wing joint of the fowl.

"And where is this uncle of thine who has shown such wise discrimination in his choice of a successor?"

"At present he is at his country house as eager in exterminating grubs and snails as he used to be in doing battle with disease. In the winter he lives here, or rather I should say, sleeps here; for he spends his days between the Medical Club and the Aquarium. At the latter he has certain pets, the feeding of which he always superintends. In the evening he goes to the Opera, or plays whist at the house of an old Baroness, whose devoted admirer he has been for some fifty years. When he is in town, what with his outdoor engagements and my own, we rarely meet, save at meal times."

"What a fine old fellow he must be!" I exclaim. "That is the sort of uncle for me."

"I heartily wish thou hadst such another," he responds.

After supper we return to the sitting-room, and over excellent wine and cigars beguile the hours until long after midnight with confidences and many a pleasant reminiscence.

As he lingers in my bedroom before saying good-night, he bursts into a sudden laugh, with his eyes running over my person.

"Herr Je!" he exclaims, "what with thy height and the strange costume together, thou 'fallest into the eye,' as we Germans say. The one without the other would be less startling. Truly thou couldst scarcely walk abroad in the streets thus, for fear the 'Strassen-jungen' should mob thee. They might take thee for a parading advertisement to some show. To-morrow, first thing, thou must pay a visit to my tailor and allow him to encase thee in civilised apparel."

"With all my heart," I fervently respond. "Oh, Karlos, thou canst have no idea what a relief it is to me to be done with disguises and assumed names. Thank God that henceforth I may dare to be myself again!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

MY FIRST PATIENT.

My figure, dressed in a respectable dark suit and grey wide-awake, must be beginning to be a familiar object to the railway servants at the Berlin Central Station, for this is the fourth day I have haunted its precincts, though it is the first on which I may reasonably expect Maruscha. To-day, as I tread the now well-known way between the Stein-Strasse and the station, my heart beats high with a sort of quivering hope—a hope that like a captured bird, unconscious of the cord that limits its flight, soars heavenwards, and feels with a sudden throb of anguish the check that hurls it back to earth. One moment I exult—Maruscha is on her way to me! In a few minutes I

will hold her in my arms with the consciousness that we part no more. Oh, the joy of it! The train that is speeding towards me, now, contains Maruscha—every moment brings her nearer to me!

The next—And if she should not be in the train? If my letter to her should have arrived too late? Maruscha, my tender one, my dove, is beating her bright wings against the bars of a vile cage, unable to fly to me! Oh God, my God, let it not be so!

I enter the station and take my stand beside the barrier, from whence I can see the train arrive and the passengers leave it. As usual, I am too early, and wait, torn by conflicting hopes and fears, scarcely conscious of my surroundings, until someone rolls back the gate close to where I lean. The station-master passes through it, watch in hand; porters swarm from all parts of the station, some pushing luggage trucks before them. Then I not only rouse, but become painfully alert. I lean forward over the barrier, eager to catch the first glimpse of the expected train; whilst my whole being thrills with the constrained emotions that besiege my breast. I start nervously as the piercing whistle smites my ear, and on it comes gliding like some huge, snorting sea-monster, trailing its long, jointed tail after it—the train that must contain my Maruscha!

The passengers stream like a swarm of ants from the different compartments, tugging at their hand-luggage. With unspeakable anxiety my eyes search the crowd, scanning each face, refusing to relinquish the hope that yet is slipping away in spite of my tenacity. Maruscha may be disguised! If so, I shall not be able to recognise her, but must patiently wait until I am seen of her.

Hope dies a hard death! It lies in its last throes when, with casual glances cast on me where I stand prominent, the stragglers pass me by, and no one has claimed me. No little figure has dissevered itself from the crowd and fluttered up to me; no little

trembling, eager hand has been placed on my arm. With a desolate, heart-sick feeling I turn and follow in the wake of an old gentleman—the last of the passengers—who in his turn follows two trucks on which is piled a quantity of luggage and paraphernalia.

I pause in the street and look aimlessly up and down. What shall I do to slay the weary hours that must intervene before I may return to meet the evening train from Königsberg? As Rosen is engaged nearly all day, and I am debarred from relieving my feelings by pouring my troubles into his sympathetic ears, I shrink from returning to the Stein-Strasse to sit alone between four walls. And how hateful to me in my present mood is the bustle and din of the city streets! A yearning to leave it all behind—to hasten to where the soothing sights and sounds of the country are about me; the free, unbroken expanse of the heavens above comes to me. There, if anywhere, my composure will be restored to me, my hopes revive.

Thinking thus, I have been absently watching the loading of a couple of droskies with the luggage from the two trucks. Baths of different shapes, including a shower bath, a folding-chair, and a folded camp-bed, have been bestowed on one of the vehicles; portmanteaus, trunks, and hat-boxes on the other. All the time, their owner has been fuming, fussing, and shouting directions at the top of his voice as to their disposal, to the discomfiture of the porters; for, as the language he speaks is English, with an occasional misapplied word in German, they fail to understand his wishes, and the end of all is confusion.

"Confound you, for idiots," the Englishman shouts, beside himself with fury. "The seat, Die Platz, I want that on the seat beside me, you fools! Valuable! Köstlich!"

The chest in question, which is banded with steel and is of considerable weight, is being raised by two sulky porters to the box. As they understand not

what its owner is saying, they go on with what they are busy, until unable to contain himself, the Englishman thrusts one of them aside, and lays hands on his property himself, thus frustrating my intention of stepping forward to offer verbal assistance.

Grasping one handle, he tugs viciously at it with the evident intention of lifting the chest back to the pavement. One end of it rests on the box, and he twists it about to bring the other handle within his reach. Involuntarily I make a movement in his direction, the words in his own tongue rising to my lips.

"That is too heavy for you, sir. Allow me to——"

I get no further. I see the chest coming down, and though I throw out my hands, I am not near enough to avert the accident. With a crash it falls, with all its weight on the Englishman's foot.

He sets up a yell which terminates in a groan, and falls insensible into my outstretched arms. The whole thing has happened in a flash, and the porters stand by, staring stupidly. It is a passing stranger who stops and quickly stooping, removes the edge of the chest from the foot, and the same individual orders a doctor to be brought.

"I am a doctor," I interpose, and to the people who have flocked round us, "Will you make way, please?"

Then I take up the injured man as if he were a child, and bear him back to the station. For a moment, my own great anxiety has shrunk into the background, and this immediate responsibility monopolises my mind. I direct my steps to the station-master's quarters, followed by the crowd to the door of the office that is thrown open for me, and I enter. The station-master, seated at a desk, looks up, takes in at a glance the bearings of the case, lays down his pen, and rising, moves quickly to open an inner door. Without a question, he precedes me into his comfortable sitting-room, where I deposit my burden on a sofa. Only now he asks, producing brandy and a glass from a cupboard—

"Where is he hurt?"

"His foot is crushed."

A certain number of curious on-lookers have followed even here—the station-master politely but firmly waves them back, and shuts the door on them. I cannot but admire the calm self-possession of the man, and his common-sense, for whilst I am loosening the Englishman's neckcloth, and administering the stimulant, he opens the window, ascertains from me by a questioning glance which is the bruised foot, and proceeds to take off the cloth shoe and the woollen stocking, displaying an ugly weal across the instep.

Already the old gentleman begins to testify by deep-drawn sighs that his senses are returning. He opens his eyes presently, looks vaguely in my face, and closes them again.

"Have you any linen by you?" I inquire of the station-master.

"I have bandages, lint; in short, everything you require, doctor," he replies. "I always have them by me, in case of accidents."

"Sensible man," I think; "should have been a doctor." And certainly no practised surgeon could have lent more able assistance than does he. He anticipates my requirements, fetching water in a basin, unfolding and holding in readiness the long strips of linen, until I am fain to observe—

"You have mistaken your vocation, Herr Bahnhofs-Verwalter."

He smiles with modest complacency.

"I have had a little practical training in surgery," he responds. "It is useful to a man of my position to know how to bind up a wound at least. I have found it so. All the railway officials bring their cuts and bruises to me."

My patient neither moans nor speaks during the operation, and I know not whether he is conscious until at its completion he murmurs—"Thank you, doctor."

I gently raise him to a sitting posture, and support him with my arm.

"How do you feel now, sir?" I inquire.

"All right, all right," he replies, yet his voice is thick and indistinct. He contorts his odd, old face, too, with a twinge of pain. "This is a bad job, eh? Ishall be detained here with it, God knows how long. How long, now, should you suppose it will take to mend; or rather, how long until I can travel?"

I hesitate. "That is difficult to say," I reply at length. "It depends much on the state of your blood and your bodily constitution. If the wound should inflame——"

"It cannot inflame! It won't inflame! Do I look like a man of gross habit?" He lashes himself up to a state of excitement which is of all things the most injurious.

"No, no, my dear sir. By no means; calm yourself."

He hurries on as if I had not spoken. "I am in excellent condition—always was—always am. Never know what it is to have a pain in my stomach! I am neither a drunkard nor a glutton, sir, and more than one-half of humanity is carried off before their time with one or other, or both! Their bloated bodies go to fatten the churchyard, and just what they deserve. I have one mutton chop to my dinner every day, sir, no more! One fresh egg for breakfast—two slices of toast per diem. And by gad, sir, unless I get killed in an accident, I shall live until I die of old age!"

"No doubt," I hasten to assent, anxious only to soothe him, adding, with a laugh, "You are a bad customer to the doctors, sir, I fear. If all were like you, we should fare badly."

He chuckles. "Not much they have ever got out of me; ha, ha!—by Jove."

And yet, in spite of his boasting, he seems to hold but a frail tenure of life. Like a withered apple, his face is wrinkled, his frame is shrunken and wizened.

At this juncture another twinge of pain forces a groan from him, and his head falls to my shoulder. An ashen hue begins to spread over his features again.

I administer another dose of brandy, which restores him.

"I am not used to pain," he murmurs, anxious to explain the cause of the faintness. "Never ail a thing, you see—never a thing."

Next he turns to the station-master. "The station-master, I presume?"

That individual, who apparently understands English, bows.

"At your service, sir."

"Would you have the goodness to see what those fools have done with my effects, Mr. Station-master? And if they are not stolen, order them to be taken to 'Hotel London.'"

The station-master again inclines his head.

"And send for a four-wheeler," I request.

"What is your name, young man?" asks the Englishman abruptly, scanning me from head to foot. "You are a doctor, I presume; but what do they call you?"

I pronounce to him my name in full. I take a pride in doing so, but it is lost on him. He gathers his white, bushy eyebrows into puckers.

"What? Do you mean to say they were barbarous enough to christen you that. Say it again. I didn't catch any of it."

I repeat it. "No doubt my name sounds strange to English ears, yet in my country it is a simple one. I am a Russian. In England I should be called only Vladimir Lubanoff. The middle title, which means 'son of Alexander,' would be left out."

"Ah, 'son of Alexander,'" he repeats. "Well, now, to my mind the name Alexander is the only sensible one of the three; and if you won't be offended, I will call you Dr. Alexander. Of course, you will see me through this affair?"

"Certainly, if you wish it, sir. Only before allowing you to engage me to do so, I must tell you that, though I have taken my degree, I have not as yet practised. Moreover, there is something else you ought to know—" I hesitate, and look him straight in the face. "The fact is, you might object to being attended by a political fugitive; but I have a friend here, Dr. Carl Rosen"—

I am hurrying on, when he bursts in with, "Fudge! You'll do. A political fugitive, you say? And you think I may object? Gad, I like a man who has the pluck to show fight when he is unfairly coerced! Now, those Nihilist fellows, I don't say they are right, mind you—not in blowing people to pieces, and that sort of thing;—God forbid! But on my word, though I disapprove of their methods, I cannot help sympathising with their cause. I am dead against coercive measures, and so are you. I like your sort, Alexander. Shake hands!"

The station-master enters and informs us that the conveyance is waiting.

"How are you going to get me to it?" inquires the Englishman, looking dubiously from one to the other of us, as if it were a question of moving one of the pyramids, which, as he is a mere bundle of bones, strikes me as both ridiculous and pathetic.

I reply by carefully gathering him up in my arms and carrying him off. He twists his face the while for all the world like a crying infant. Having disposed him on the seat of the conveyance with a cushion, lent by the station-master, under his injured foot, we start at a slow pace towards the hotel. My patient moans occasionally, still twisting his face into every conceivable shape, and I lean towards him, steadying the cushion with both hands, to prevent him from feeling the movement. On the broad steps of "Hotel London" the proprietor is waiting to receive us. He hurries to the street as we halt, with many solicitations; for, as he informs

us, "Meester Gough's effects had arrived, and he had heard of that gentleman's sad accident." He has two men in readiness with an invalid's couch, which assistance, however, I decline, requesting to be shown Mr. Gough's rooms. I again take him up. We cross a vestibule adorned with alternate statues and acacias in enormous tubs, ascend a flight of wide shallow steps, and enter the spacious bedroom allotted to the Englishman.

He is much exhausted, and as helpless as a child, and partly because I am glad of some occupation to divert me from perplexed and miserable thoughts, partly because I am sorry for the old man who seems to depend on me, I dismiss the man-servant, and do for him those offices an experienced hand might have done better, if less tenderly. Though he speaks not much, I see that it soothes and gratifies him.

I stay with him, tending him, changing his compresses, administering the cooling draught I have prescribed for him; and the hours I had dreaded to face flow on almost unheeded, and in perfect quietude of mind. It is as if I had turned the key on its Blue-beard chamber.

At length the fading light apprises me that the door of that chamber must be approached again. I do so at first with composure. Hope has rallied in this still atmosphere. A servant knocks and brings in a lamp. I consult the gold repeater that rests in a pocket above my patient's head. He opens his eyes and rouses.

"What, going?" he asks.

"Yes; I have an engagement, but I will look in again to-night, and see you before I go to bed. I am staying in the 'Stein-Strasse,' not five minutes' walk from here."

The old man's countenance has fallen. "Of course you have engagements. You must go to your friends. It is good of you to have stayed with me so long. It must have been dull—miserable, sitting in this

gloomy room with a stupid old man, who hasn't a word to throw at a dog. And by gad, sir, I am grateful to you."

"Do not mention it. I had nothing else to do. And now, since I am obliged to go, I will send you a nurse."

"A nurse! Need I—is it absolutely necessary? Wouldn't one of the men in the house do, eh? I am not used to having women about me."

Looking down on Mr. Gough's perturbed countenance, I make a sudden resolve.

"If you will have me instead, and put up with my clumsy ways; I have nothing to do."

"Would you, now? Well, that's kind of you, my lad!" His face beams with pleasure and relief, then just as quickly falls again, as he adds, "No, no. Go your ways and send the nurse. I cannot accept it. You want to enjoy yourself in Berlin—go to the theatres, and that sort of thing. Thank you all the same."

"I shall be back again," I explain, just as if he had not spoken; "in, let me see—" I hesitate. "I cannot exactly say how long I shall be gone. I have a friend to meet at the train, and I must see Rosen, to explain; but you may rely on me this evening, some time. If my friend should not come——" I stop short, overwhelmed at once by the terrible significance of the words I utter. My self-possession deserts me.

"My God!" I cry; "if she comes not, I—I am of all men the most miserable!"

Mr. Gough lifts his head from the pillow and regards me.

"My dear boy, you said 'she.' Is it your sister whose safety is threatened? Perhaps she has got into trouble, like yourself?"

"It is my betrothed," I groan. "And if she comes not by this train, I may conclude that she is in a Russian prison."

I seem to see her there, and sink down beside the bed, hiding my face in my hands. I feel a trembling hand on my head, and hear a broken voice, feeble and piping, but exceedingly sympathetic, "Poor lad! Poor lad! And with all this on your mind, you could yet think of the trouble of a stranger! But, bless us all, look up, my man! The case isn't lost yet. The young woman may come. Never cry out before you're hurt."

I rise. "Yes," I say, bracing myself, and drawing a long breath. "You are right. I cry before I am hurt; and yet not quite. I expected her yesterday, and the blows I have sustained have been crushing ones. Methinks if this one descend it will send me mad."

I stand a few moments, striving to calm my agitation ere I move towards the door.

"Whatever it be it must be met," I say at length. And I go.

CHAPTER XIX.

MARUSCHA AGAIN.

"UNTER DEN LINDEN" is all alight when I descend the hotel steps. Streams of light pour out of almost every door and window, throwing bright bars across my path. And the world of Berlin is amusing itself in easy, careless, comfortable German fashion. Everybody is abroad; some on their way to theatres or concert-rooms, others sauntering in pairs, enjoying the fine evening. The air is full of gay voices and laughter, which, proceeding from many throats, is yet blended into one continuous note of contentment, like the hum of a swarm of bees in a blossoming lime-tree. I am in the midst of it, yet as distinct and isolated from it as some disembodied spirit gliding unseen through a city throng, bent on a ghostly mission. One all-absorbing thought engages me—Maruscha.

Neither hopes nor plans for the future, only the great uncertain climax centring in Maruscha, which is advancing, and which I hasten tremblingly to meet.

The first person my eye alights on in the station is the station-master. He stands talking to a gentleman; but quietly observant, he sees me at once and raises his cap.

Is it possible that the episode that brought us together occurred only a few hours ago? It dawns on me slowly at sight of him as from the far distant past.

He joins me almost immediately.

"Guten Abend, Herr Doktor! How is your patient?" he inquires.

It costs me an effort to bring my mind to bear on his question. He has time to follow it up with another observation before I find words to reply.

"I trust the poor old gentleman will soon be on his legs again?"

"I have every reason to believe he will. He is fortunately not a feverish subject, and at his age fever is what is most to be feared. He was as cool as a cucumber when I left him a while ago, and if he only continues so, the bruise will soon mend."

"That is well."

We walk side by side to the gate in the barrier. Then the station-master remarks—

"You are here to meet the express from Königsberg?"

"Yes," I reply laconically.

"You have had many disappointments," he continues; "it is some days since I first observed you waiting." He smiles pleasantly. "Your height makes you conspicuous."

"Yes," I respond, and involuntarily my breast heaves with a sigh; "I have been expecting a friend this four days."

He rolls back the gate and invites me to pass through with him.

"I hope your perseverance may be rewarded this

evening," he politely hopes. "Ah, here she is!" This, as the shriek of the whistle is heard.

I know not after this whether he quits me or remains. I am conscious only of the train curving into the station.

The platform is at once a scene of confusion, in which I move hither and thither in wild distraction, getting into everybody's way; pushed and jostled by them. My eyes dart everywhere amongst the alighting passengers, and into the recesses of the dimly illumined carriages. In vain. Nowhere see I Maruscha.

There is a lady in one of the carriages who is small and slight like my Maruscha. Her face is averted. She is collecting her effects from the net above her head, and a porter, who is already well laden, stands ready to receive them.

I press forward to the door. She turns—turns to me an old, female face, that peers at me with a startled look from under a dark travelling hood.

"Ich bitte, Herr!" exclaims the porter impatiently, for in my retreat I have pushed against him, causing him to stagger.

I am now darting off towards a group of struggling women near one of the luggage vans.

"Vladimir!"

The voice is joyous as the enraptured trill of the lark direct from the gates of Heaven! It is Maruscha's voice!

"Vladimir; I am here!"

A little gloved hand is on my arm arresting me; its touch shoots to my heart like an electric shock and takes away my breath. I look into a pair of blue eyes, upturned to me; dancing in joy, brimming with tears—deep wells of love, all mine!—Maruscha's eyes!

"Maruscha—at last!" I gasp.

My arms surround her, and we kiss each other as a pair of beatified lovers might kiss when they meet in Paradise, with the world and its sorrows behind

them, and before them an eternity of blissful union. I suppose it is the platform of a railway station I am treading, and not the "streets of gold," and the stir and turmoil of the work-o'-day world that is around me, and not the rustle of angels' wings; but it matters not to me which it is, for it is verily Maruscha who walks beside me, making some ordinary observations about her luggage. Two trunks, I think she says she has with her, and she winds up with, "Vladimir, thou art not a little bit improved with thy travels! Thou art as absent-minded as ever! I know by thy looks that thou hast not taken in a word of what I have been saying to thee."

I laugh. "And thou, Maruscha, art not yet cured of thy vain habit; thou art still the same little scold!" I retaliate.

As we are leaving the station, a man I must have seen somewhere before smiles at me and even takes my hand and presses it in passing.

"Ich gratuliere!" he whispers.

Ah, it is the station-master—it flashes on me! I turn and wave back at him. I take off my hat and swing it. He looks after us, returning my greeting with a broadening smile.

The driver stands waiting for orders.

"Where shall I tell him to drive, Maruscha? The seventh Heaven?" I murmur mischievously.

Maruscha is so bewitching when she assumes that little air of outraged dignity, with her lips trying to purse, yet trembling with suppressed mirth.

"Stein-Strasse, No. 79," I say to the driver with perfect solemnity.

"It is well that he comprehends not thy foolish talk," observes Maruscha; "or he might take thee for an escaped lunatic!"

Rosen must have been watching out from the balcony, for he is in the street when the droski stops at the door. To witness his wild state of excitement, an on-looker might suppose that it was *his* betrothed

he had been expecting, and who had arrived. He lifts Maruscha to the pavement, and shakes both her hands with frantic energy.

"Welcome! Welcome, Maria Petrovna!" he cries.

Truly, if he had not confided to me his passion for a certain "allerliebstes Mädchen," whose image he carries in that locket attached to his watch-chain, I could find it in my heart to be jealous. He gives her his arm up the stairs, too, ignoring my existence; and in the sitting-room again takes possession of her hands, and gazing at her with delight and satisfaction reiterates—

"Welcome! Welcome, Maria Petrovna. I am mighty glad to see you! I was sure you would come to-night—quite convinced of it. And all is in readiness for you, and here is Frau Meyer to show you to your room."

In the doorway appears smiling, and smoothing her apron, a large-boned, fresh-coloured German matron, whom I have not seen before, and whom the good fellow must have got into the house to wait on Maruscha, and do the proprieties.

"Thank you so much, Herr Doktor," responds Maruscha, in her pretty, soft German, though he has spoken Russian; and she beams on him in a way that would turn the head of the veriest dullard.

"Not 'Herr Doktor,' I pray you," he protests; "call me Don Carlos, as of old."

I recollect with a foolish pang, that Carl Rosen knew Maruscha when I did not. It was at Rosen's I first met her, and straightway yielded up my heart to her.

"Since I have your permission, by all means, Don Carlos. Without it I should not have dared to take the liberty with so important a personage as you have grown." She looks at him with a charming affectation of shyness. "You look quite awfully respectable now, the 'Herr Doktor' every inch."

Rosen blushes like a schoolboy. "You have not forgotten how to tease, Maruscha," he responds,

stroking his sleek moustache with a sidelong self-conscious glance at her.

She trips up to Frau Meyer and takes her arm with that winning familiarity, yet courteous grace, which Maruscha always adopts towards those of her sex whose position is inferior to her own; thus sweeping down with a sublime contempt the paltry barrier that an arrogant society has raised between man and man. Maruscha has a profound reverence for humanity, and a strict regard to its rights. She is a socialist to her heart's core. It is only with the base that she is haughty.

"Come; you will take me to my room, dear Madame?" she says.

The good woman's countenance flushes with pleasure. I know her heart is going out to my sweet girl, whom she must love, as all creatures do.

The moment we are alone, Rosen rushes at me and begins to wring my hands, since he has had to relinquish Maruscha's.

"Thank God, Vlasha!" he cries joyously. "Thou hast her safe at last! At last, at last, this great anxiety is lifted from thee. It has been a terrible time; but it is over, and all is well."

He wipes his heated, excited face with his handkerchief. I perceive that the affectionate little fellow's eyes are moist. Only now I become conscious of all I owe him, so self-absorbed have I been. His ever ready sympathy; his generosity in placing his house at my disposal; his forethought for Maruscha's reception. As the recollection of it all comes to me, gratitude overwhelms me. I release my left hand and enclose his right in both of mine with a fervent clasp. My vision grows dim as I look down into his guileless visage.

"Dear old Don, thou hast placed me under obligations, such as I——" He rudely cuts me short.

"Come now, old fellow, none of that. Potztausend! Can a man not entertain his friends without

having speeches made at him? I should be offended only that I know thou meanest well."

"I am silent," I reply, with trembling lips.

Maruscha joins us. I see her now without her hat, and with her glorious crown of golden hair. What a radiance she sheds around her! My sunbeam! The great beauty and purity of her looks inspire me with a kind of awe. I feel constrained and awkward in her presence, finding nothing to say, though I watch her every movement, as if spellbound. All she says and does is a new wonder to me, and I even neglect my supper to feed my enraptured senses of sight and hearing. With strange perversity she encourages me not, neither by word nor glance, but devotes herself exclusively to our host, chatting lightly on different topics—her journey, her travelling companions, the excellent condition of her appetite, and the excellence of Rosen's *cuisine*.

German fashion, we have tea after supper, which Maruscha dispenses. In handing me my cup, our fingers meet. The cup trembles between us. Was it due to my thrilling nerves alone, or thrilled also my sensitive dove at my touch?

She shuns my ardent gaze, yet the tell-tale colour spreads from her cheek to neck and brow.

At length there is a pause in the conversation and Rosen addresses me—

"Where on earth hast thou been all day, Vlasha?" he inquires. "I have not set eyes on thee since morning. Surely thou hast not spent the day at the station?"

I rouse. For the first time since Maruscha's arrival I remember my patient.

"Thou remindest me that I have something to tell thee. I have set up an opposition shop." I laugh. "I have got a patient."

Rosen stares at me incredulously and yet expectantly, as one who waits for the point of a joke.

"I am quite serious. I have really got a patient,

and what is more, I have promised to go to him to-night. He lies at 'Hotel London,' Unter den Linden."

I feel Maruscha's blue eyes on my face now.

"Was du sagst!" exclaims Rosen. "Where camest thou across him?"

"He was thrown at me, so to speak. Got his foot crushed within a yard of me." I relate the circumstances of the case.

"Poor old gentleman!" exclaims Maruscha, when I have ended. "Vladimir, thou must return to him at once. Think how lonely he must feel in the strange hotel, and suffering such pain. It is thy bounden duty to go to him now."

"That is thy opinion, Maruscha?" I respond, fixing on her a look of scathing reproach, which she refuses to see. "Be it so, I go." I rise and begin hastily to button my coat across my chest. "Good night, Maruscha; I will see thee in the morning, unless—unless my patient should require me."

A burst of laughter from Rosen breaks in on the first act of my tragedy.

"What—already, spit-fire!" he cries, and jumping up, comes round to me and pushes me back to my chair. "Out of this house thou goest not until my return, which will be in a couple of hours. As I am obliged to go to my patients, whatever Maruscha may say, it is thy 'bounden duty' to stay and entertain my guest."

"But if he has given his word——" begins Maruscha, demurely.

"He will keep it," interposes Rosen. "He has promised to turn up at 'Hotel London' some time between this and midnight, and he will do so. Meanwhile, Vlasha, if thou hast no objection, I will call in passing, and see how the Englishman does. I can also set his mind at ease about thee."

I mumble something to which he listens not, taking my affirmative as a matter of course, and leads the way to the sitting-room, where he places Maruscha on the sofa.

I stalk in the rear, feeling my position to be an undignified one. I still contemplate entering a hypocritical protest against this arrangement of Rosen's. Surely I may be allowed to manage my own affairs? I have it on my lips to say that all things considered, I think it advisable that I should go, but it is too late. He is calling to us a hearty "Aufwiedersehen," and the door closes behind him.

I am standing some paces from Maruscha. She sits looking down at her fingers, whilst she nervously twists round and round the ring I gave her two years ago.

I regard her silently with growing wrath, for she raises not her head nor makes any movement towards me. At length I speak.

"Maruscha, I can still go if it is thy wish?" A pause. "Since thou wouldst imply that I neglect a duty in remaining." Another pause. "I like not such implications, even though they are ungrounded. Of course, I left the Englishman in good hands, in charge of the landlady, who is a particularly kind, motherly person; nevertheless, I will go, since it is thy wish."

I am by this time in a frenzy of indignation. She sits still in her place, and the sweet protestations I felt so sure of, are not uttered. Only—"My wish?" she repeats. "Said I aught of any personal wish in the matter? I would not have thee break an engagement on my account—that is all."

"Thou knowest I pledged not myself to return at a particular time. However, it matters not, I do thy will. Good night, Maruscha; sleep well."

I go to her and hold towards her my hand. She heeds it not, and the corners of her rosy mouth go down and quiver. Now she bursts forth—"How deplorable is it that I must always suffer to be misunderstood by thee!"

A tear glistens like a diamond in the corner of her eye.

"Nay, Maruscha; thy words were plain——" I begin.

"Yes; twist and misconstrue them, my poor words, to fit thy case! I am used to this."

She speaks with a beautiful resignation, and her handkerchief goes up.

I am at once overwhelmed with the conviction that I am a brute, and that Maruscha is the most injured of women. I throw myself on my knees beside her.

"Forgive me, my long-suffering darling! I indeed misunderstood thee. It is my unfortunate temper to be for ever seeking a grievance. And now, miserable wretch that I am, I have made thee weep on this evening of all others! Sweet, patient heart, once more forgive me! Ah, it is always 'forgive, forgive,' for I am always wounding thee! Look up again, my dove, and let me read my pardon in thy tender eyes."

I venture to draw her gently to my breast. She resists not, and I stop my pleadings, scarcely drawing my breath for fear of disturbing so perfect an arrangement. My cheek rests on her golden hair, my arms encircle her. I feel the agitated rise and fall of her bosom. She heaves a sigh.

"Vladimir," she whispers presently; and, oh the wonder of it; her soft arms steal about my neck: "I am deceitful and wicked."

"Thou art an angel!" I murmur.

"No, no! I try to torment thee. It was cruel and stupid of me; and how frivolous, too, after all thou hast suffered."

Her mouth is close to mine. I kiss it.

"Thou wilt have much to endure with me," she continues mournfully, as if I had not interrupted her with that kiss.

"Yes, Maruscha, in marrying thee, I make a martyr of myself; yet I will bear my cross, thou wilt find, with becoming fortitude." I respond cheerfully, lifting her face and looking into her eyes.

"Thou knowest not how perverse I am."

"I know it well; and alas, I cannot resist thee!"

"Vladimir!" with sudden energy and a contraction of the brows, "I wish thou wouldst recognise my faults now! It will prevent disappointment afterwards."

"I do, I do, my love. I anticipate the shocks that are in store for me, yet am I bewitched. I know exactly how Socrates felt when he was courting Xanthippe."

Maruscha's mouth begins to twitch. She bites her lip, yet her eyes betray the rising laughter. And alas! to hide it, she frees herself from my arms.

"Thou art most provoking, Vladimir," she says. "Not a word of sense can one talk with thee."

Nevertheless, it is in sober sense we talk, as we sit side by side, half an hour later, my arm round her waist, her hand in mine. In reply to many questions of mine she gives me an account of her uneventful life at home, with its silent and concealed undercurrent of anguish; broken harshly in upon by a letter from Olga, with the intelligence of the death of our noble brother, Ivan Ivanovitch. Condemned to a long term of exile, he had poisoned himself in prison. I knew he carried the means of his release on his person, but little thought he would use it so soon. Couldst thou not have been patient and learnt from my experiences that whilst there is life there is hope? Thou art a bitter drop in my cup of happiness, oh, my brother! I have lost in thee what the world rarely gives but once, and seldom that—a true friend.

And the stout heart, Paval Gregoreivitch, banished too. Yet I know Paval. He will find his feet, will make himself a home in the distant land whither his devoted wife will follow him. And he will raise an army of converts to the cause of liberty, and live as full a life in Siberia as in Petersburg.

Maruscha sheds tears when she speaks of Ivan, and they flow again when she tell me of her secret preparations and flight from home. Ah, what she has suffered!

"May God forgive me the deception!" she cries remorsefully; "I dared not tell them about thee, and had to invent an excuse to get away. I pretended to have received an invitation from a school friend. They think I am with her now."

She hangs her head and seems to ruminate. Presently she observes, "Vladimir, I cannot see that I did wrong. It is said 'Thou shalt leave father and mother and cleave to thy husband.'"

She lifts her face to me, and a look of solemn and ineffable devotion comes into it, before which my spirit falls prostrate. It is so much more than I deserve. I strain her to my heart.

"True, my precious wife."

"And thou needest me, Vladimir; thou hast no one now but me."

"Only thee, and yet everything. My all in all."

There is a pause. A great contentment shines in her eyes that for a space entirely occupies her. Then she requests, "Now tell me all that has befallen thee since we parted in Petersburg?"

I begin from the moment I tore myself from her embrace, and relate everything down to the hour I met her at the station. Though my recital is often interrupted—sometimes Maruscha breaks into sobs, and I am fain to stop and comfort her. Sometimes she is shaken with hysterical laughter, or utters exclamations of horror, surprise, and thankfulness.

After all is told, she must see me in my clerical disguise. When I appear before her in my flowing kaftan, beard, and curled locks, she makes the room resound with her merry laughter, so that Rosen enters on us unawares. He joins in her merriment, whilst I parade before them until they have enough of it.

On returning to them, reinvested in my citizen's garb, Rosen holds towards me his watch.

"Yes, yes, I know," I respond, with a sigh of regret. "All good things come to an end most rapidly, and I must go."

Yet one good thing comes to me; ah, how good, how precious a thing it is! The crown and seal of this eventful day! It is the voluntary kiss Maruscha bestows on me at the door, which glows on my lips and in my heart as I hurry along the lighted streets.

CHAPTER XX.

A PROPOSITION.

MARUSCHA has quite put my nose out with my patient. The old man, metaphorically, went down before her, when her radiant face first shone on him a week ago. Though he submits to a little superintendence on my part, I am otherwise superfluous. It is "Molly" (as he calls her) to whom he looks to dress his wound, to shake up his pillows, to read to him the news, and beguile the tedium of his couch with talk. Thus he monopolises her day. Now it is all very right and proper to show kindness to a lonely, dependent old invalid, and far be it from me to object to such disposal of Maruscha's time, provided a modest share of it be left to me, her betrothed husband. Therefore I feel justly sore this morning at the way I have been treated. Her words rankle, and the glance of withering reproach with which she accompanied them:—

"Vladimir, hast thou a heart?"

And all I asked was that she might take a walk with me in the "Thiergarten" before going to Mr. Gough. I feel savage with the old man, too. The other day he actually took on himself to hint that I undervalue Maruscha!

"That young woman of yours is a treasure; she is worth her weight in gold, Alexander," he said. "It is to be hoped you will make much of her when you get her."

As if I am a likely man to use Maruscha or any

woman badly! But it is natural; the English sometimes beat their wives! How long is this to last, I wonder? I am like a third wheel to a cart. I sit apart here at the window, staring into the street, and sometimes at Maruscha, though never an answering glance comes my way. She is reading the "share list" to him from the *Times*. Now he stops her.

"Read that item again, Molly, my dear," he says.

And she repeats the figures, which I know convey no meaning to her. In spite of my vexation, I must confess that it is attractive to hear her silvery tongue pronouncing the lisping English. No wonder he keeps her at it.

At last she has got to the end of the column, and I detect a faint, stifled sigh of relief as she lays the paper on her lap.

"Thank you, my dear. Now would you mind hoisting this cushion a bit so that I can sit upright? There! Bless you, what a pair of hands the small woman has, to be sure! Now, be off with you and take a look at the shops. I want to have some talk with that young man of yours."

Is it possible? Can I hear aright? He is actually sending Maruscha away! She may well look surprised. Like myself, she can scarcely believe the evidence of her ears. She rises very slowly, and says—

"I hope you do not think that I am tired already, Mr. Gough. I have not read to you the 'leader' yet. Do you really wish me to go?"

"Yes, go your ways for an hour. We will have the 'leader' when you come back. I have something to say to the doctor. Don't be offended, my dear; it is on a matter of business, and such matters are best discussed by men alone."

Maruscha goes, without another word, to the bedroom, and returns almost at once in her hat and a black lace affair—I think she calls it her "fichu"—in which she looks ravishingly pretty and trim. Nevertheless, I regard her gloomily. The more so

because of Mr. Gough's open admiration. He is completely turning her head.

"Eh, but she's a rare smart lass," he exclaims. "You're a lucky chap, Alexander."

Maruscha smiles, well pleased, though she protests. "Fie, you flatter, Mr. Gough! And look how Vladimir is vexed! He thinks you spoil me."

She darts on me a mischievous glance. I force a smile because Mr. Gough is looking at me. I fear it is a poor attempt.

"What's up with you, man?" he inquires, and there is an irritating twinkle in his eyes.

"Nothing whatever," I answer indifferently. "Why should you think that anything is 'up with me?' I have not complained."

He laughs. "Dash my buttons!" he cries, "it is a rum thing"—this Englishman has a strange mode of expressing himself—"but liquor and love affect some men alike; it makes them 'naggy.' Ha, ha!"

I know not what he means, so I receive his observations in stony silence.

He is still laughing as I leave the room to accompany Maruscha to the street.

"I am beginning to detest that Englishman, Maruscha!" I say savagely, when we are in the corridor. "And may I be hanged if I go back to him at present! I will go with thee."

"Indeed thou must not, Vladimir. How canst thou think of being so rude? What ails thee? Thou art always cross now—'naggy,' as the dear old man calls it." And she laughs. This is too much!

I stop short, roll on her eyes which must be terrible, for the mirth goes out of her features instantly, leaving them blank.

This is beyond my endurance. "How long," I ask, "is it to go on?"

"What?" she falters.

"How long has this wretched old man to continue to monopolise all thy time and thoughts? It is pre-

posterous. Save in fetching thee to and fro, we have never an hour to ourselves. Is it fair, I ask thee?"

"I thought to do thee pleasure—to forward thy interests, in showing a little attention to thy patient, Vladimir. And this is what I get," she plains. "Alas, I cannot please thee."

There is a stir of compunction in my breast. Yet am I aware that for some unfathomable woman's reason she has been wilfully tormenting me all these days, notwithstanding that she turns on me the most innocent and guileless eyes, and assumes the air of an injured martyr. It is a strange mystery, this feminine habit of tormenting the loved one. Maruscha has ever done so with me, whom I know she loves with all her heart and soul. Will she carry this extraordinary perversion into matrimonial life? I fancy not, therefore I am resolved to bring it to a speedy end. She shall know, too, that I see through her.

"Thou hast not tried to please me, Maruscha," I say severely. "Thou hast tried to torment me after thy manner, and thou hast succeeded. But go not too far; it is enough. Let be now."

We have gained the outer steps, where is bustle of strangers arriving. There is no place for further parley, so I content myself with pressing her hand and whispering with a glance of depreciation, "Be kind."

She replies nothing, but I carry back with me to the Englishman's room the remembrance of a pair of blue eyes, in which compassion and reproach are beautifully blent.

My mood is wonderfully subdued when I enter, and I take the seat to which Mr. Gough motions me at the foot of his couch, with something akin to meekness.

"Now, Doctor, I want to talk to you about yourself," he begins briskly. "You have already been very frank with me and told me about the precious

mess you've got yourself into in Russia. Well, you know my opinion of that: you've made a fool of yourself, and worse than that, you've acted criminally."

I draw myself up with dignity. "Excuse me, sir," I interpose. "But I neither want the censure nor the applause of any man living regarding that action in my past life. In making you acquainted with it I merely wished to avoid coming into relations with a stranger who seemed disposed to place confidence in me, under false pretensions. And I beg——"

"Just so, my man," he interrupts, putting his hand on my arm. "That's what I like about you. You were fair and square with me, and though I highly disapprove——"

I make an impatient movement, and am about to speak.

"Well, well, I'll say no more. 'Mum' is the word both now and hereafter," he breaks in hastily, "especially as you already know my sentiments. And what I wanted to ask you was this. Have you any plans for the future? You're engaged to this very nice young woman, who has no one to look to but you, and you'll have to marry her at once."

"Mr. Gough!" I thunder, boiling over with indignation at what I consider most impertinent interference.

"Bless my soul, you needn't fire up that way! What I say is correct; isn't it?"

"Yet no concern of yours, sir," I retort.

"But I'm making it my concern. And I'll do it whether you like it or not. Molly's a fine lass—far too good for you. And I want to see her settled with a home over her head. Now, don't fly off again"—as I half rise to my feet. "Bottle up that 'fizz' and listen to me. I mean well by you, and you know you can't afford to show temper like that; at least, if you do, you're a greater fool than I took you for, when you have the lass to consider, too."

What this blunt, rough fellow says is true: I have

no reason to be proud, nor can I afford it. Though his manner is offensive, he means well. There is no sense in finding fault with a pig because it grunts, instead of sings like the nightingale. I compose myself and look attentive.

"There, that's better," he says, with an approving nod. "Now we can proceed to business. You know who I am, if you have not forgotten. I am a mill-owner and 'hang-out' at 'New Mills' in Lancashire. I am proud to say that I am a self-made man, and give work to about two thousand men. And by gad! Samuel Gough's men have no reason to regret that their master is not a gentleman born, but was once one of themselves. I challenge any manufacturer in the United Kingdom to turn out a finer set of men or to show better cottages than we have at 'New Mills.' However, I hope you'll see for yourself, for what I want to propose to you is to go back with me. We require a doctor—have done so for some time past, only I was loth to lay the old chap off, fearing to hurt his feelings; and now my manager writes to me this morning that he is down with gout. So I have resolved to pension him, and if you'll have the berth you're welcome to it. I give five hundred a year for the job, and there's a bit of practice to be picked up in the neighbourhood besides."

Slowly I take in the purport of his words. I can scarcely believe in my good fortune.

"But—but, you do not mean to say," I stammer, "that you offer me this—this very excellent post without any credentials? How do you know that I am not an impostor?"

"My man, I know what I am about. I have seen all the credentials I require, and without them I engage no man. You showed me them when you told me those private matters, which shall henceforth be nameless. I never asked your confidence, and you volunteered it, though it was against your

interests to do so, because you are an honest man and have a conscience. Leave me alone for knowing good stuff when I see it, and looking after my own interests in trying to secure it. I want a young, active, energetic doctor for my people; I think you are likely to suit, and by Jove! you'll have to work for all you get out of me. My doctor has no easy sit-down, I can assure you. It's night and day work, so you had better take time to consider. And I suppose the lass had better be consulted. The women folk like to have their finger in the pie, and it's well to humour them. You can follow your own counsel all the same."

To this last observation I reply not, but I cordially thank him for his good opinion of me.

"And as to Maruscha, she will be overjoyed," I cry. "No need to wait to consult her; I know her mind, and I accept your generous offer. Believe me, it will be my anxiety to prove myself worthy of your confidence, sir."

"Say no more. I know that. Shake hands on it, man, and good luck to you."

And thus the transaction is concluded, leaving me in a state of elation which it is beyond me to describe. To sit still and wait Maruscha's return with calmness is impossible to me. I wander about the room like a caged hyena, stopping at intervals at the windows to gaze up the street in the direction I had seen her take.

Mr. Gough occupies himself with the perusal of his business letters, and seems to have forgotten my existence. I am startled when he suddenly calls to me.

"Now about the splicing, Doctor? You must see that it's got to be done at once."

I turn and look at him inquiringly. "The splicing?" I repeat, the expression conveying no meaning to me. He laughs. "Splicing—wedding, lad," he explains. "Since we've settled this business matter, and you've got a job to go to, the sooner the knot is tied the better. Get a special licence, and be married at an

English Church, like Christians, and I'll give Molly away, bless her. When you take me driving to-morrow to get the air, we might just as well drive to the church as any other place. Eh? It would be killing two birds with one stone."

How he talks! Just as if Maruscha was a piece of furniture to be disposed of as we think fit. Yet, though I know it is vain imagining, how the mere suggestion sets my blood on fire. Maruscha, my wedded wife—mine wholly. My dove, tamed and domesticated, glad to turn and nestle in my bosom. No more audacious flights, leaving me to stretch out longing arms towards her. No more to see her flutter down *almost* within my grasp, and yet evade me. Ah, if it could be; but he little knows her who thinks to trap her so easily! She is not to be caught, yet will she fly to me some bright day of her own accord, only she will take her time.

I hesitate so long seeking a reply, that at length he asks: "What, are you timid about putting on the yoke?"

This brings my words quick enough.

"It strikes me, sir, you have some wrong ideas about me," I say with dignity. "When I marry, it will be no yoke I put on, I assure you. It is my wife who will be subject to me, her husband, as is right and proper. And Maruscha is too sensible a girl to wish to have her husband under the slipper."

He laughs in a way I like not. "She keeps the whip hand now, at any rate," he mutters to himself; yet I hear, and his remark rankles.

"You know not how to manage women," I respond loftily. "You must use with them a little diplomacy when you are courting them. They like to feel that they have not relinquished their liberty, and you allow them much latitude. You do not, therefore, drop the reins."

His queer old face, which looks as if it had been squeezed broad-ways, takes a queer expression. He

puckers it up into wrinkles in the corners of his eyes and mouth and between his brows. His eyes shoot malicious and sly gleams at me.

"Then you will tighten the reins and drive with Molly to church to-morrow, since it has become necessary," he says. "You can get the licence to-day."

"But—but I see not the necessity for such violent haste," I stammer. "If there were, Maruscha would not hesitate; as there is not, it would be impertinence on my part to ask it."

I think of how she silenced me when I had spoken of our early marriage shortly after her arrival: "About that I have quite made up my mind, Vladimir; I shall seek some employment until thou hast got something to do. It will never answer for thee to be burdened with a wife before thou art settled."

"Well, I have got something to do, thank God. That barrier is removed; yet I should not wonder in the least if she still persists in staying behind in Berlin for a time to assert her independence; so perverse in some respects is my adorable Maruscha. She can do it, for Rosen will supply her with nursing. Therefore I contemplate with dubious feelings the renewal of the marriage subject."

"Tut, nonsense," Mr. Gough exclaims. "If the lass cares for you, she will be ready enough to wed, unless she thinks she has got a soft 'un to deal with. I guarantee now to manage the job for you, if you will let me."

"Thank you," I reply coldly, "I prefer to manage my own private affairs."

"As you like. Only I hope you will bring her round to it, Doctor. You see now that my foot is mending and you go with me there is no reason why we shouldn't start for England at once. I've been absent too long already, and though I have an excellent manager, he's not like the 'boss.' Why not leave this the day after to-morrow? There's nothing to prevent

it once you were wed. And wed you must be before we go, for more reasons than one. It will look more respectable for you two to arrive at New Mills as man and wife. Think what remarks the folks would make—even though the lass did stay with me till after the wedding—if we bring her along with us as if we'd picked her off the streets? Besides, the wives at our place have always been used to a married doctor. They might not like to be attended by a single young chap."

Whilst he speaks, hope grows apace within me. This is sound reason. Maruscha will recognise it as such and be docile. Is it possible that happiness is to be mine so soon? This sudden and unexpected brilliance of my prospects quite staggers me. Only this morning how gloomily I had thought of my future; my union with Maruscha seemed so far distant. I had talked about it with Rosen, who had offered me a loan to buy some country practice, and though I was grateful to him, and anxious to get a beginning of any kind, I knew that Maruscha would not marry me until the borrowed money was paid off to the last farthing.

And now as I realise the extent of this influx of good fortune, I could shout for joy. My future is secured. Work given me to do amongst workers—a wide field before me wherein to labour according to my inclinations, and Maruscha thrust by generous circumstances into my arms to encourage and aid me! Is there anything more under heaven left for me to ask?

I endeavour to answer in a business-like tone, however, concealing my joyful emotions.

"There is sense in what you say, Mr. Gough, and I am sure I need only explain the case to my betrothed. She is reasonable and tractable. A fly might lead Maruscha if he but show a little art in the leading. She did speak of following her profession as a nurse until I got settled, for she has a fine spirit."

"Bosh! Stuff and nonsense!" bursts in the old man.

"But now," I proceed calmly, "it is different—quite out of the question."

"I should rather think so," he again interrupts. "It was a mad scheme at any time."

"And Maruscha is the last girl in the world to make a fuss about being a little hurried in an affair of this kind when the urgency is made clear to her."

"I should hope so." Mr. Gough's tones become more decided with every interjection. "The lass is not such a fool!"

"Of course not," I assure him and myself.

I will not give any place to certain fluttering doubts that struggle for existence in my heart. I crush them in the birth, ere ever they take form. At the same time I burn to have assurance from Maruscha's lips, so I rise hastily.

"And I would like the matter settled at once; therefore, if you will excuse me, I will go and meet Maruscha and tell her the good news, and fix matters with her."

"Certainly, away with you. And mind you don't forget the marriage licence; and oh—by the way—how about the cash, Doctor? Have you enough in hand?"

I hesitate. "I have some money still—a little—not perhaps enough, but Rosen will lend——"

"Nothing of the sort," he interrupts. "There's no need for you to take a loan from any man. I will advance you a quarter's wages. It makes no difference to me, you know! In fact, I prefer it. You won't leave me in the lurch if you have taken 'arles.'"

"There is no fear of that. And indeed, sir, you are very kind."

"Not a bit of it! I mean to have my money's worth out of you. Reach me my cheque-book there, and the pen and ink."

He points to them beside an open desk on the table.

I comply, and he fills and tears out a leaf.

"Get it cashed at 'Blankschildt and Breitmann's,' Unter den Linden," he says, and hands it to me.

I put it into my pocket-book. "Is there anything I can do for you before I go?" I ask, taking up my hat.

"Nothing whatever, thank you, Doctor," he replies briskly.

"Half an hour will suffice me to explain things to Maruscha," I observe magnanimously. "Then she will be with you again."

"Don't hurry on my account," he responds. "You have the prior claim."

"Half an hour," I repeat from the door.

CHAPTER XXI.

INTO THE SUNLIGHT.

I MEET Maruscha on the steps, coming in. Rushing out in hot haste I collide with her, and meet the regard of those blue eyes again, in which is just the same expression of compassionate reproach that was there when we parted an hour ago, only now the eyes are rounded with surprise.

"Vladimir! Thou hadst almost knocked me over! What has come to thee?" she says.

"Ah, what, Maruscha? Everything has come to me!" I exult, putting my hand through her arm and drawing her along with me to the street.

Maruscha falls immediately out of her dignified *rôle* and shows me only the undisguised wonderment of a child in her beautiful face.

"What is it?" she asks, under her breath, and she lets me lead her on, away from the hotel, without resisting, so completely has curiosity taken possession of her.

"I have got a splendid appointment."

"Oh-h!" she articulates with a little joyous gasp.

"Yes, Maruscha; only think what luck! An appointment worth five hundred pounds sterling a year.

That is in Russian roubles something like two thousand five hundred."

Maruscha stares before her into space. Her lips divide. The sum is evidently too large to be taken in all at once.

"It is a good thing; yes!" I observe, as I watch the gradual dawning of comprehension in her innocent eyes.

She sighs. "It is a large sum."

She looks at the ground for a space, then inquiringly at me.

"But I cannot understand. When I left thee a short while ago thou knewest nought of this? Ah, I see! It is through that dear, good man, Mr. Gough, that thou hast this good fortune. He has been busy in thy behalf, and has succeeded in getting the appointment for thee in England. And now I know why he asked me whether I should like to live in England. I am glad I said I should."

"Thou art right and wrong, Maruscha. Mr. Gough has not required to busy himself in my behalf, for the gift he has offered me is his to bestow on whom he likes. It is as doctor to his own people at 'New Mills' in Lancashire that he has appointed me. It is a grand thing for me, independent of the stipend. Just what I would have chosen, to have my work laid amongst workers, where I shall not be called on to cure diseases brought on by idleness and luxury. My feeling is to let such creatures perish, for they are cumberers of the earth, and an eyesore to honest humanity. The money earned in reinstating them is ill-gotten; I would have none of it! Proud am I to belong to the Aristocracy of Labour, and in serving it body and soul, I am honoured. And perhaps, Maruscha, I may be privileged to pick, here and there, a down-trodden brother from the mire, and set him on the road to Freedom," I add humbly.

"Yes, Vladimir," she responds. And her gaze is solemn and uplifted, as if she saw the Angel of Liberty descending from the clouds. There is a long

pause, during which my thoughts revert to the object of this interview. The moment seems particularly propitious for broaching of the delicate subject. Maruscha's mood is soft, and apparently submissive. Whilst I am beating about for some happy mode of introducing it, she breaks the silence.

"Mr. Gough has talked to me much about 'New Mills' and his people. What pride he takes in them —as a father in his children! I think he is a very good and just man, and they are fortunate who get employment under him."

I nod. However much I may admire Mr. Gough's virtues, I cannot bring my mind to bear on them at this moment. Yet this praise of Mr. Gough rather fits in with my purpose, too; so I take it up.

"Yes, Maruscha, he is all thou sayest. Moreover he is a man of judgment, practical and sensible. A man whose advice is worth listening to."

She unconsciously plays into my hands.

"That it is, Vladimir: he has so much common sense, that I should feel inclined to act on his advice even though it were contrary to my own judgment. I should lose confidence in myself, knowing how much wiser he is than I."

"Quite so, Maruscha. And when this morning he advised our immediate marriage, I waived my own opinion that it was asking too much of thee, and came round to his way of thinking. He *made* me do so, for his reasons were so conclusive that they admitted of no argument."

"But surely, Vladimir——"

"And I said, instantly," I continue, feverishly, "Maruscha is the last girl in the world to raise objections under the circumstances. She is not capable of such folly."

She tries to put in a word, but I hurry on—"My betrothed is not a silly *dame de société* to stand on ceremony. I need only explain to her how imperative it is——"

It comes at last!

"Vladimir!" My name is pronounced in a manner so commanding that the flow of my language is instantly checked.

"Wilt thou permit me to speak?"

"I wait but thy reply, my own! For indeed there is no time to lose. The licence of marriage must be got to-day—at the English church, Maruscha—to save all trouble and delay of——"

My hand is whisked with exceeding swiftness from its resting-place in the bend of Maruscha's arm. She withdraws herself.

"What have I done?" I ask, my emotions halting between anxiety and indignation.

"Done!" she gasps. "Thou talkest as if—as if I were some poor, helpless creature, to be twisted round thy finger! Thinks Mr. Gough that it is one of his mill-girls he has to deal with? I am surprised at thee, Vladimir, to think so little of my dignity as to allow this Englishman to imagine that thou hast but to beckon and I will be ready to wed thee!"

"Maruscha, wilt thou listen to the reasons—the very weighty reasons——"

"No reasons could justify such an unseemly proceeding."

"Mr. Gough returns to England in a day or two. I go with him. Wilt thou let me go alone?"

I put the question in cold, precise tones, forcibly holding a barrier to the surging waves of passion that threaten to sweep my soul.

She glances at me askance. Her lip is still trembling with anger, yet in the corners of her eyes lurks a shadow of self-distrust.

The answer comes, low and uncertain, but still it comes. "Why not?"

"It is enough!" I say between closed teeth. The barrier is down and the floods leap and rage unchecked. Only my tongue is under control, and my words form themselves with a strange distinctness; slow and calm.

"In that case, Maruscha, as I depart in a few hours, and have business to transact, perhaps thou wilt be good enough to make thy intentions known to Mr. Gough."

I lift my hat and stride rapidly away, neither knowing nor caring whither. Methinks as I go I catch her voice uttering my name in half suffocated entreaty. What is it to me? Is it possible that now she regrets the ungentleness of her speech, but the fact remains the same. She goes not with me to England, and will keep me waiting, weeks, months, a year—whatever term she considers necessary to the assertion of her dignity and independence. From my heart I wish she were the helpless, dependent creature she so much fears to be considered.

In the tumult of my bitter thoughts I heed not whither my hurrying footsteps are leading me, until trees are rustling over my head, and I discover that I am skirting the "Thiergarten." I plunge into one of the many shady alleys, following its winding course to deeper shade, and by degrees the coolness and quietude soothe my vexed spirit and temper my heated blood. Then I remember the cheque in my pocket-book, and Rosen, who may be waiting dinner for me, and retrace my steps to the town.

On my way from the bank to the "Stein-Strasse" I have to pass "Hotel London." I glance up at a certain window. There is a little figure conspicuous, with a wistful face gazing into the street. I raise my hat—for I cannot pretend not to see it—with the formality of a soldier saluting his chief. I permit not my eye to rest a single instant on it, much as I desire to read its expression. My mood, though subdued, is dark and grim. Only I am conscious of a sensation of fierce triumph—transient as a flash in the pan—because my knowledge of Maruscha informs me that she is craning her neck to watch me out of sight, longing to see me turn, and that it wrings her heart-strings to observe my unbend-

ing demeanour. This little flavour of vengeance is mine!

Rosen is hanging over the balcony, also on the look-out, as I come up.

"Look quick, Vlasha!" he calls excitedly. "Thou hast spoilt the 'Schmorbraten' with thy dawdling!"

To talk to me of beef!

When we are seated at the dinner table, I tell him without any elation, of my appointment.

"Herr Je!" he exclaims. "What luck! And thou sittest there with a face as long as an undertaker's telling me this great news! What is wrong! Is it that thou likest not to settle in England? Or perhaps Maruscha——"

"Yes, Maruscha," I interrupt, sharply emphasising the name. "Canst thou credit it? She refuses to go with me, at such short notice, and will stay here, supporting herself, until she thinks fit to marry! She stands on her dignity in a case like this! I wish thou hadst never promised her nursing, then she could not have played me this trick. And yet," I add, with a desperate sigh, "she could have got other employment with ease. She would have been chosen out of a thousand candidates with those sweet persuasive airs she knows so well to put on."

Whilst I am speaking, Rosen wears a knowing smile. He says—

"I will give you a bit of advice, Vlasha. Get the marriage licence. Say nothing further to Maruscha. Preserve an air of melancholy resignation, and leave her to herself. My name is not Karl Rosen if she lets thee go without her!"

I admit to myself that in a secret recess of my heart has dwelt all along a hope—vague and shadowy, but still a hope—that such might be the end. That hope takes definite shape now; it assumes such dimensions that my appetite disappears before it, and the moment dinner is over I leave the house.

In a bookseller's shop I examine the pages of a

directory for the address of the English clergyman, and to his residence I immediately hasten.

He is not at home. "Is it a matter of importance?" I am asked.

"It is on business of the greatest urgency," I reply.

I am shown into a room and invited to wait. Mr. Carr had gone to visit one of his congregation who was sick, and might return at any moment. English and German periodicals are placed within my reach and I am left alone.

Reading in my present frame of mind is out of the question. Though I take up the "Rundschau" and stare at the printed characters, they convey no meaning to my inner consciousness. In reality, I am listening to the footsteps passing outside, and trying to distinguish between the male and female tread. So engrossed am I in this occupation that I start violently when a bell peals through the house. This is followed by the tones of a loud, full voice in the hall; a firm, aggressive step, and then the door is thrown open to admit Mr. Carr.

He comes forward with an extensive display of very fine teeth, and offers me his hand. He is a ruddy-skinned, prosperous looking man, stout and hale, bearing in his countenance the evidence of perfect self-contentment.

"In what way can I serve you, sir?" he asks.

I state my business, and in an incredibly short time it is transacted. I am in possession of the licence, and Mr. Carr of his fee.

Next he inquires when he can have the pleasure of performing the ceremony.

"It is not quite fixed," I reply. "I will inform you later, either by letter or in person."

He bows, and at once proceeds to show me out, shaking hands with me again at the street door. The briskness and promptitude of this English clergyman are extraordinary. It strikes me in crossing the hall that these manifestations may have

some connection with the savoury smell of cooking viands which meets my nose.

After this I wend my way to the shop of a certain jeweller, "Unter den Linden," and purchase the smallest wedding ring he has, and a keeper, in the selection of which I am so fastidious that it has grown quite dusk when I leave the premises with the two rings in my pocket.

My most natural course now would seem to return to the hotel. Such is also my inclination, but by no means my intention. I trample under foot my fierce desire to be standing face to face with Maruscha. She shall have ample time to feel the sting of remorse and my displeasure. She imagines she has a love-lorn fool to deal with! She will find herself mistaken.

Nevertheless, as the gloom of evening conceals me from observation, I saunter in that direction.

Mr. Gough's room is lighted up. I can see the gaselier with its five lights from the street, for the blinds are not drawn down. I light a cigarette and take my stand under one of those dingy lime-trees which lend to the street its name, keeping those windows in my eye.

"Maruscha will be dull, left all alone so long with the old man," I muse. I have never been so long away from her. At this moment she is watching the door, listening for my step, and growing every moment more anxious and remorseful.

And I feel no compunction. I even dwell on her supposed suffering with satisfaction. "It is well so. She is receiving a just punishment, and it will teach her a lesson. She will see—ah!"

Her form appears at one of the windows. She encloses her face with her two hands, and peers out, a dark outline against the light. Her features are hidden from me; would that I could read them!

For a full minute she remains in this attitude. I can almost *hear* the sigh of disappointment with which she abandons it, so sure am I that it is uttered.

Now I begin to pace up and down, and turn over in my mind how I shall comport myself when at length Maruscha and I are together and alone.

I am studiously polite—taciturn, calm, resigned, yet melancholy withal. I make no allusion to our disagreement of the morning, but confine my conversation to the beauty of the evening and my approaching departure. I propose that to-morrow, being our last day together, we should spend part of it in seeking for her a suitable lodging, as of course she cannot remain at Rosen's after I am gone. To show how entirely sincere I am, I will suggest a suitable locality. And what will Maruscha say? How act? I thrill with rapturous anticipation as I recall the finale of another difference we had. A series of enchanting pictures rise before me. In the contemplation I puff several cigarettes into the air. My enjoyment of the concluding scene is intense. In that airy vision she is murmuring tearful self-reproaches, with her arms about my neck, which I repeatedly interrupt with my lips to hers, when I fall—plump!—from the realm of my sweet imaginings to the dusty lime avenue with "Hotel London" before me, at one of whose windows on the *bel-étage* stands Maruscha, in her hat, and drawing on her gloves. She is preparing to leave the hotel, alone.

In a few strides I am across the street and mounting the steps. In a few moments I am knocking at Mr. Gough's sitting room door.

"Come in!" sounds the old man's piping treble, and I enter.

Maruscha turns towards me and I had almost fallen out of my *rôle* at the onset. It is only by instantly removing my regard from her, and concentrating it and my attention on Mr. Gough, that I am enabled to check my rising emotions. Yet I still seem to see only that pathetic face of misery with its wide, blue eyes blurred with tears.

"Well, sir!" I exclaim with hard cheerfulness.

"How have you done since I left you this morning?"

I go forward to his couch in my professional capacity and feel his pulse.

"Oh, I say; bother!" he snaps impatiently, snatching away his hand. "Leave my pulse alone. It's as regular as clockwork, always is, always was—never varies! Where the deuce have you been all this time? There's Molly, poor lass, been crying her eyes out about you! More fool she, I tell her! Thought you'd gone off with another woman, or made away with yourself."

I hear a low, half-stifled contradiction of this latter statement from Maruscha; yet I still determinedly avoid looking in her direction.

"If you had given it a thought, Mr. Gough, my absence was easily accounted for. I have naturally many arrangements to make before we leave."

"Fiddle-sticks!" he pipes contemptuously. "Don't think to deceive me. I know all about it; it's temper."

He doubtless sees the burning wrath mounting to my face, for he puts up his hand and quickly adds—

"Well, well, don't flame up! I'll say no more. It's not my concern. And now get you gone, she's waiting for you. Good-night, both." (I have gone back to sleep at Rosen's lately.) "I know you're dying to be off, so that you may kiss and make friends."

Really this old Englishman's impudence is beyond a joke. "Sir——" I begin.

"Come, come," he interposes, as if soothing a vexed child. "I know how matters stand, and you're a bit ruffled, as you're like to be. But I've been taking her in hand for you, and it's all right. I told her she had been a bad lass, and she promised to make amends. You'll find her as tractable as a pet lamb, so don't you go for to be too hard on her. And if she do kick over the traces a bit at first, let her have her fling. She'll spin along grand when once you have got her broken to harness!" The

audacity of the remark robs me of the power of speech. I am too aghast for anger. Maruscha "broken to harness!"

My first clear perception after its utterance is: How is Maruscha affected by it? I direct towards her a look of awful curiosity.

To my amazement, she breaks into a short, hysterical laugh. Her face is suffused with a vivid crimson flush. Her lips quiver with the conflicting emotions of grief and amusement, yet not a touch of anger. She steps quickly up to the old man and gives him her hand.

"Good-night; sleep well, you most dreadful man!" she falters, and still that dubious flickering of mirth plays about her mouth. And as she hurries to the door I am fain to hold my peace and follow her, only bestowing on Mr. Gough a parting look which I hope conveys with it some suggestion of my unuttered and unutterable indignation.

On my way to the door I hear a peculiar, sustained noise which proceeds I can only imagine from the throat of Mr. Gough. It reminds me of the cackle of a hen. I have, however, no time to consider its meaning, for I have overtaken Maruscha and we descend to the street together. I stalk along by her side, and during a considerable time there is silence between us. I look straight before me, seeing nothing, yet am I conscious that from time to time Maruscha directs a covert, sidelong glance up at my face. I expect that I am playing my part well, and that my outer man is conveying to those observant eyes an idea of stony resignation, though my inner man is engaging in a struggle that may any moment end in humiliation.

Gradually Maruscha's breathing becomes affected. She breathes short and fast, her hand goes to her side, and at length she halts.

"Vladimir! I pray thee go not so fast," she gasps, and tears are in her voice. "I—I am not well."

Where I get the moral strength to resist this pathetic appeal I know not, but I am enabled to reply with just so much concern as a brother might show to a sister under similar circumstances.

"Not well, Maruscha? I am sorry to hear it. Yet I am not surprised. The atmosphere in Mr. Gough's room was most oppressive. Perhaps thou wilt accept the support of my arm? I pray thee!"

She hesitates a moment whilst I hold it stiffly towards her, then she takes it.

"Thanks, Vladimir," she says with beautiful humility.

It is as if a fluttering bird had descended and was nestling on my arm. The longing to press it closely to my heart is almost irresistible; the sensation of that timid touch thrills me to pain, yet I let it lie there as if my arm were a senseless limb of wood.

Maruscha heaves a deep sigh. We proceed for some little way in silence until I prepare to lead her across the wide street to enter the Stein-Strasse on the opposite side. Then she arrests me.

"Vladimir, I think a little turn in the air would revive me," she says. "Unless — unless thou wouldst prefer——"

"By no means, Maruscha. And it is indeed a happy thought. The evening is lovely and the walk will do thee good. How art thou affected, Maruscha? Is it thy head?"

I look down on her with brotherly concern.

A gasping sob escapes her. "Yes, Vladimir; my head—and, and oh, Vladimir!——"

The hand on my arm is instantly strained to my heart. No longer can I bear the fierce restraint, and ere I am aware my favourite pet name for her rushes to my lips.

"My sweet dove!"

And I deliberately enclose the little trembling hand in my disengaged one. There is another long silence. I know she cannot speak now, she is furtively and silently getting rid of some tears. I lead her on and

on until, for the second time to-day, the dark, dense trees of the "Thiergarten" are at one side of me. We are alone here, and I venture to carry the imprisoned hand to my lips. As Maruscha offers no resistance, I kiss it softly many times. Presently I whisper—

"Is thy head *very* bad, my own?"

"Yes—no—it is not my head at all. It is—it is—oh, I have been so miserable! And I have something to say!" She makes the confession in a sort of desperate gush.

"Yes, my precious one!" I murmur, with my pulses starting off at fever rate. Now it is coming!

Under the trees here it is quite dark. I steal my arm about her waist.

"Mr. Gough has been talking to me, Vladimir. I told him everything. He says I am a bad lass." She attempts a little laugh, which ends in a sob. I give her an encouraging squeeze. "He is quite right, that is what I am."

"Thou art perfection!" I whisper. And, indeed, I think it. Perfectly charming to me now in retrospect, is this morning's episode, since it has given to me this draught of absolute bliss.

"He has fully explained all to me, Vladimir, how needful—how imperative it is that thou shouldst—shouldst marry before going to England, and we owe so much to Mr. Gough that it seems absolutely wicked not to consider his wishes; and he says that he would be very much disappointed in me if I were to refuse, so I agreed." She hesitates and droops, then makes another effort. "He has promised—offered to wait three days—and the day after to-morrow—and—oh, Vladimir, it is so soon!"

I halt and catch her to my breast.

"Tell me that I understand aright?" I say in agitated tones. "The day after to-morrow thou hast promised to become my wife?"

The answer comes tremulous and shy.

"If thou wilt take me, Vladimir."

It is the same evening. We have gone through the form of taking supper, and Rosen, with a lover's tact and sympathy, has left us sole possessors of his sitting-room. We are seated together in very close proximity on the sofa. I take from my pocket a tiny cardboard box, and from it the rings. Maruscha goes into raptures at the sight of the keeper. I single out the third slender finger of her left hand, and try them both on. They fit exactly.

"It is a lucky omen, Maruscha!" I observe, as she sits looking down at them with a wistful smile. "Notwithstanding that I had no measure, they are a perfect fit."

A sudden thought seems to strike her. She looks up wonderingly into my face.

"Hast thou bought them to-day?" she interrogates.

"Yes, Maruscha, to-day!"

Her countenance falls.

"Ah, thou knewest all the time that I must yield!" she says, and there is disappointment and a touch of bitterness in her tones. "I am but a poor weak thing."

I tell a white lie—yes, it is a white one—for it spreads brightness over Maruscha's fair face again.

"Nay, I dared not even hope! How could I? But I thought I might as well have the wedding ring by me against a future day. There seemed a sort of melancholy consolation in carrying about with me the golden symbol of thy troth."

She laughs, well pleased.

"Thou foolish boy!" she cries, resting her bright head on the very breast-pocket wherein lies our marriage licence. And I leave her in blissful ignorance of its presence there.

After this there falls on us a silence and a deep solemnity. I can read in Maruscha's pure features that she shares my feeling of awe at the wonder and magnitude of our happiness. Full well we know that it falls not to the lot of man to enjoy for long a bliss

without alloy, and this may not endure. Yet now—now it is ours!

We look into each other's eyes, the tears tremble in Maruscha's, like drops of dew in blue forget-me-not stars. She sighs.

"Vladimir, we are too happy!" she breathes at length.

I clasp her to me in a close embrace, for my heart almost misgives me at her words. Then I feel her soft arms about my neck, and as in a flash, my future lies revealed to me. A pleasing, anxious life, with its human cares and sorrows, with its storms and its sunshine, its disappointments and its triumphs, and at my side my loving and helpful Maruscha—my beloved wife, and I feel strong and confident.

"Never fear, Maruscha!" I cry. "We may not always be like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, yet I am not dismayed; for when we go hence, we go together. And we will work together under a free heaven and in the light of day, for the Valley of the Shadow lies behind us!"

THE END.

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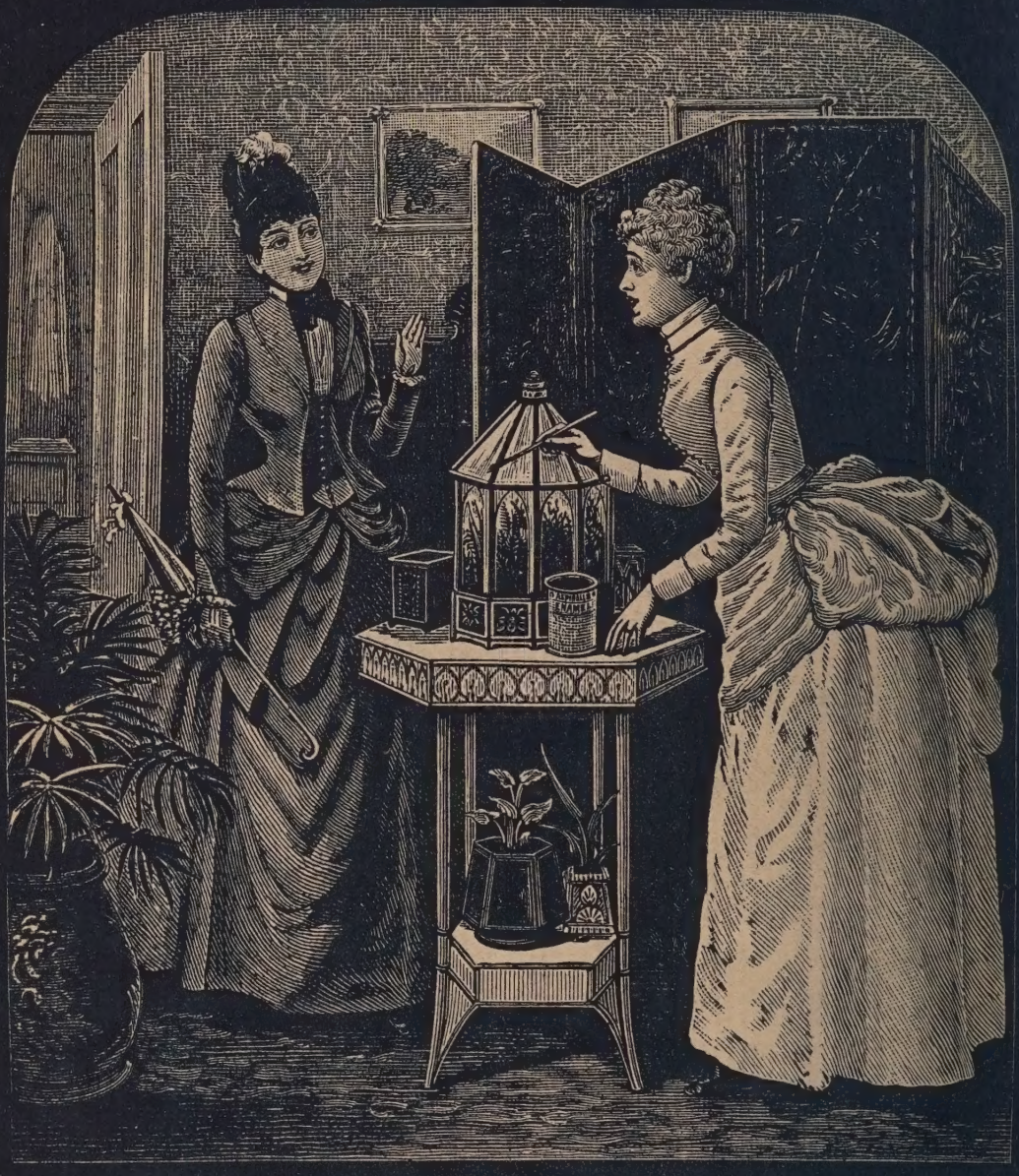

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